

**CHURCH GROWTH AS PART OF A  
WHOLISTIC MISSIOLOGICAL APPROACH?**

**BY**

**JÖRG SCHMIDT**

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**SUPERVISOR: REV. DS. N.A. BOTHA**

**JOINT SUPERVISOR: PROF. DR. TH. AHRENS**

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## ABSTRACT

Church growth missiology has been severely criticized by ecumenical, but also by evangelical missiologists. This often led to its rejection as it was considered incompatible with other missiological approaches. But church growth does deal effectively with important issues as other missiologies do. In light of Martin Luther's interpretation of the First Commandment a more general wholistic missiological approach is requested, which considers the full spectrum of human needs, and under which church growth can function with other missiologies together. The treatment of the task of missiology and the unity by attitude of the missiologist contribute to the argument. Therefore four major criticisms brought forth against church growth are dealt with in order to evaluate and finally suggest a potential theological compatibility of this approach with other missiologies. This is further confirmed by a brief introduction to important elements of the present status of church growth theory development.

### Key terms:

Church growth; Wholistic missiology; The First Commandment; Maslow's hierarchy of human needs; Theological compatability; Unity; Ecumenical and evangelical movements; Priority of evangelism; Scope of salvation; Ecclesiocentrism; Pragmatism.

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## INTRODUCTION

"Church growth", a rather recent missiological approach roughly four decades old, is quite controversial, both in the evangelical and in the ecumenical streams of Christianity (cf Scherer 1978:178). While the number of adherents is dramatically increasing every year, the arguments against it from both wings of the church are very identical. They are to be taken very seriously as they have led to a rejection of church growth methodology by many altogether.

On the other hand, many church leaders and laypeople alike are intrigued by the subject matter in a secularized Europe, where the church at large is numerically decreasing and the continent is called by many "post-Christian" already. The plantatio ecclesiae scheme, the idea of church planting, is receiving fresh attention all over the European continent. Not only the free church denominations and independent churches, which owe their very existence to the continuous activity of church planting, but state churches and old confessional church movements are experiencing a revival of this theme in their midst. The Church of England experiences a resurrection of old dying parishes by "church planting" about every week. And in Germany even Peter Beier (1), the leader of the second largest Protestant church (Rheinische Evangelische Kirche) is reported to have raised the question if the parish system is going to survive or if it will be replaced by churches with voluntary membership systems regardless of the geographic location of their residence (Richtungsgemeinden).

Nico A. Botha (in Saayman 1992:138) points out, it is impossible to separate the proclamation of the gospel from church planting. This is felt by many pastors of the German Lutheran and Reformed churches as well (cf Knoblauch & Eickhoff & Aschoff 1992). As church planting is a part of church growth missiology, the discussion on the pros and cons of church growth goes full speed in German Protestant and even Catholic churches.

Church growth has the reputation of dealing with questions of the meaning of life, eternal destiny, etc., while other missiological approaches often focus on more fundamental (physical) existential needs and human rights questions. Therefore the need for a more general missiological approach under which church growth with other missiologies will be able to function together is presented in chapter 1. The question is raised, if church growth has the potential of compatibility with other missiologies.

Chapter 2 deals with the task of missiology and proves that both, the search for a wholistic missiological approach as well as church growth methodology itself fulfil the classical criteria for the task of missiology.

Chapter 3 deals with the issue of unity of mission. The theme of unity is treated separately because this is a very special prerequisite for the attitude of the missiologist who attempts to develop wholistic missiological concepts.

Chapter 4 takes up extensively four main criticisms brought forth against church growth. To think through their implications perhaps

is the most critical task as this determines if church growth can be compatible with other missiologies or not.

Chapter 5 finally points to elements of wholistic church growth concepts as they have been suggested by prominent authors, summarizes the development of the argument of this study and concludes with answering the introductory question for a possible compatibility of church growth with other missiologies in the affirmative.

## CHAPTER ONE: CHURCH GROWTH - A NEW MISSIOLOGICAL PHENOMENON

### 1.1 THE BACKGROUND OF CHURCH GROWTH MISSIOLOGY

#### 1.1.1 CHURCH GROWTH'S EMPHASIS AND METHODOLOGY

Church growth as missiological theory and methodology is a rather recent phenomenon, dating back to the fifties of this century. It has first rushed to prominence as the brainchild of the American missiologist Donald A. McGavran. The emphasis of this theory can be perceived in two parts, exactly as the name suggests. The first is on the *church* - with ecclesiological aspects at the heart of it. It therefore creates an intensive relationship between missiology and ecclesiology by making the church itself a chief concern of mission. The second emphasis is on *growth*, the development of the church. It asks the question: Is the church growing and developing to its full potential? It attempts to apply this question to the history of the church and its mission with the aim to gather the facts responsible for the growth or decline of the church in the past, thus providing a frame to evaluate the present ("How well are we doing, how well could we do?"). But it does not stop with the evaluation of the past and of the present, it builds a bridge into the future: The information provided becomes the base for a (strategic) future planning, which tries to do full justice to all available data of past and present developments. Perhaps this explains the greatest strength of this approach: the providing of a research tool, which combines a wide variety of sciences with their respective research methods under the umbrella of missiology. In scientific methodology, in actual research work church growth is clearly related to disciplines such



as church history and sociology of religions. But it has a much wider scope than those as here each science is invited to make a contribution as long as it sheds light on the questions under discussion.

In practical church work it helps to open the eyes by looking at the hard facts, which provides understanding for the dynamics at work in - and responsible for - a certain situation. Church growth tries to do away with the fog hanging over the success or failure of a mission. In fact, supposed failures in church work will often transpire to be seen as outstanding successes in light of all the contextual factors research has examined. And celebrated successes will perhaps not look so good any more, or if the evidence confirms otherwise, will shine even brighter by explaining this success. Critical examination, thorough diagnosis and thoughtful evaluation are at the heart of church growth research. The analysis then becomes a sound foundation for the "remedy", for decisions regarding future action.

For all practical purposes church growth research indicates what church or mission society projects are wasters of time, energy or money. It suggests what developments are in order, on target, on line with the objectives established for this ministry, and it clearly suggests what projects need much more investment of resources in order to bring forth the hoped for results.

In being concerned with a maximum effectiveness of the church and its mission, church growth's underlying assumption is: The more

rigorous the evaluation of the facts, the better the planning for the future. The church growth approach thereby helps to move from missiological reflection to missiological impulse giving by providing recommendations for the future. In this respect it satisfies what is indeed so often perceived as a real need by church and mission leaders. Church growth then fills an important leadership function in providing a framework of orientation. In other words: It assists in exercising responsible church leadership.

The methods of church growth can be applied to local churches, regional church networks, national confessional churches, and international denominations. Therefore it is receiving interest from a wide spectrum of church ministers.

Church growth allows for a relative theological neutrality. That means that all types of churches, ecumenical, evangelical, Roman Catholic or Orthodox, can use it as a methodology and fill it with theological content. At the same time this has to be relativated. Church growth theory can never be neatly separated from the theology of the church engaged in applying it. It therefore appears that church growth can become as good or as bad as the theology of a particular church using it is perceived to be. While the discussion goes on, whether church growth is indeed a value neutral methodology or not (cf Schwarz 1993:75-95), Rudolf Bohren's (in Schwarz 1990:76) point relating to Practical Theology that the question of "how to do it" is always a deeply theological question should be given merit. Therefore, instead of describing church growth as a completely value neutral methodology, the

qualifying expression of "relative" theological neutrality is preferred in this study.

The accelerated interest in church growth in churches around the world during the last decade can be seen as a reaction to other trends in modern societies. First, the development of measurement of institutions, particularly in the business world as well as, for instance, the evaluation of education has become normal. Meanwhile, this even represents the "cutting edge" of current thinking in the respective fields, so it can only be expected for people to grow interested in attempting to measure and analyze the church as well.

Furthermore, the attention paid to the area of the efficiency of organizations led to similar questions asked in respect of the church: How and where should the church improve its work and ministry? In light of these trends of everyday evaluation of organizations, work and values, the question surfacing with church leaders, "Why are some churches growing and others declining?", is only natural and to be expected (cf Towns 1981:9).

#### 1.1.2 EARLY HISTORY OF CHURCH GROWTH; BEGINNING OF POLARIZATION

The first pioneer of the church growth school of thought was, as previously stated, the American missiologist Donald A. McGavran. As a missionary to India, McGavran had been responsible for the administration of Christian schools, hospitals and evangelistic work from 1936 until 1954. During these years he started to wonder what the reasons were for the considerable growth of some denominations and the drastic decline of others under seemingly

similar circumstances. Upon return to the United States he was confronted with the same phenomenon. The superiors of the mission organization he worked for started to listen to the questions McGavran posed, and finally entrusted him with the task to compile analytical and comparative case studies of churches in different countries. This he was able to finish only with the methodological help of other scientific disciples, primarily the social sciences. Out of this grew the first attempt to systematize a church growth theory. The first books were written, an "Institute for Church Growth" was founded in Eugene, Oregon. Several years later it moved to Southern California, where it became the graduate "School of World Mission" of the famous Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena (cf McGavran & Arn 1977:1-10).

McGavran's (1980:7-8) idea was that the theology of a church should not be a hindrance to the use of the church growth missiology. While he stressed the point for the basic positions of church growth to be profoundly biblical and theological, he suggested the possibility of making it compatible with one's own theological stance:

"Do not attack church growth as theologically inadequate. Make it adequate according to the doctrines emphasized by your Branch of the Church" (1).

In the very beginning this opened the way for the possibility of most diverse church growth theories to be developed. His thoughts were received in many WCC circles with interest and openmindedness during the first years. But when McGavran started to present

himself as a spokesperson for those evangelicals who were highly critical of the WCC (his article "Will Uppsala betray the two billion?" will be considered later), he was rejected by many ecumenicals as a representative of ultra-evangelicalism.

Furthermore, as time went by McGavran developed his own church growth theory in more and more detail, arriving at conclusions which were not really necessary for a theologically neutral church growth missiology. Many consider it his biggest weakness to take observed sociological realities, translating them into theological imperatives. Examples are his concept of "People Movements" and the "Homogeneous Unit Principle". It is not so much questioned that his work had been of great value in sensitizing churches to important societal dynamics (2). McGavran did point to important realities which often had not been considered appropriately. But the criticism he received was against an indiscriminate use of this knowledge for purely pragmatic purposes, very often perceived to have come out of a weak if not doubtful theological reasoning. For instance, what the outcome of a theological imperative for a homogenous unit oriented proclamation of the gospel and structuring of the church can be, the Apartheid system of South Africa has proven, although the theological reasons for Apartheid do not go back to church growth theory at all, but can be related more to the indigenous people church concept (cf Saayman 1983:132-143). David Bosch (1983a:218:ff) criticizes McGavran for reading the homogenous unit principle into the Bible in his interpretation of Matthew 28:16-20. Padilla (1983:285-303) describes how some church growth scholars still practice this same habit of reading the homogenous unit principle into other scriptures as well.

But church growth as a theory and method in itself does not at all necessitate any translation of sociological facts into missiological commands. The way McGavran treats the homogenous unit principle might be essential for his own church growth paradigm. But this is not the case for all other attempts to construct church growth theories. In fact, that other attempts at church growth can be quite original, the German work of Schwarz and Schwarz "Theologie des Gemeindeaufbaus - Ein Versuch" (1984) demonstrates successfully.

McGavran's prominence, his stand in the heated ecumenical-evangelical controversies of the late sixties and early seventies, as well as the newness of the theory, have all obscured the fact that many elements of McGavran's suggestions for church growth theory were not necessary nor essential for church growth as a value neutral research tool. The position he took in the ecumenical/evangelical polarization led to his rejection by many ecumenicals. But with the rejection of McGavran, church growth theory was dismissed from the agenda of many ecumenical missiologists as well. The baby was poured out with the bathwater.

It is especially the weaknesses and debatable points in McGavran's understanding of church growth which led to church growth's rejection as a missiological approach. This study assumes that many criticisms voiced against church growth by ecumenical missiologists are valid indeed and to be taken very seriously. It will be seen that those criticisms in many respects are almost identical with criticisms against evangelical theological positions. Some of the criticisms represent the status of the

ecumenical/evangelical debate around 1970. This fact is extremely important to realize. It might explain why many leading critics regrettably have given church growth missiology no further serious thought. So this study agrees with some of those criticisms by spelling out debatable positions of certain versions of church growth theory. At the same time it also criticizes the critics where they have not seriously tried to see the potential or actual overlap between their own positions and those of church growth protagonists. The gap can be bridged by an "attitude of unity" of the missiologists" by fleshing out and establishing common ground of ecumenical and evangelical theology as they relate to the church growth approach. Thus a wide adaptability of church growth as a research tool in respect to many different churches and theologies is suggested.

#### 1.1.3 CHURCH GROWTH - A CONTEXTUAL MISSIOLOGY

This study starts with the assumption that there is a perceived need with pastors and other church leaders for missiological "leadership" or impulse giving in terms of recommendations of how to better (re)act towards the problems and challenges of a given context. Does not a theology become relevant only when it has become contextual? What then determines the contextuality of theology? The *problems* of a given context do, as Professor Theodor Ahrens of the University of Hamburg points out (2). By recommending appropriate behavior in response to these problems, the now "contextual" approach contextualizes theology, thus starting to exercise missiological leadership. Thus missiology gives focus to theology for everyday life. Church growth is assumed as the best contextual approach for many situations and

therefore to be treated the same as the other so-called "contextual theologies". And the church growth approach has missiological leadership or impulse giving as much on its agenda as those. To spell this out more foundationally: *Isn't it the task of missiology to contextualize theology? And isn't missiology thereby "automatically" moving from missiological reflection to missiological leadership?*

As far as the church growth approach is concerned, it needs to be realized that it takes an "attitude of unity" of the missiologist to think through and beyond the previously established walls of ecumenical/evangelical polarization in order to rethink the perhaps already dismissed idea of church growth. In many situations a church growth approach might be the primary contextualization of the gospel and theology. In this light the foundational start on the task of missiology and the relationship between mission and unity should be interpreted.

## **1.2 IN SEARCH OF A WHOLISTIC MISSIOLOGICAL APPROACH**

If the above statement is true that the problems of a given context determine the missiological response, thus contextualizing theology, then a general missiological approach seems to be necessary out of which the different contextualizations can flow into each other. This appears possible only if the full range of human needs is considered.

In 1954 the psychologist Abraham Maslow has introduced the famous "Hierarchy of Needs", which is constructed like a pyramid (Craig



1989:45). At the bottom are the physiological needs, followed by the safety needs, then by the belongingness needs, after that by the esteem needs and finally by the need for self-actualization. Maslow argued that only as a person has the needs on the lower level met, his or her capacities are open for the desire to have the needs of the next level met.

In many countries liberation theology and church growth missiology are not looked upon as two compatible missiologies because of their dealing with different levels of the hierarchy of human needs. The same is perceived of the theological approaches of diaconal and the church growth oriented wings of the German Evangelische Kirche. While in some countries there are indeed certain irreconcilable elements between some Marxist versions of liberation theology and church growth missiology as there are between some branches of the socio-political wing and church growth in Germany, these different approaches do not necessarily have to be incompatible. Rather the tendency of focusing on one part of the spectrum of human needs only, not having the full range of needs in sight, leads to an assumed or an actual incombatability. But many times this is only assumed because the areas of actual overlap are not thought through enough. To spell out these areas of overlap between ecumenical and evangelical missiologies, between church growth and the classical contextual theologies as well as between their soteriological goals is a very important prerequisite for a wholistic missiological approach. As people receive help, they should be expected to move up the pyramid of Maslow's hierarchy. This will be assisted well if one contextual missiological approach can easily lead to another

approach as needs change. For this to actually work, existing theological overlap to identify clearly the areas of compatibility needs to be spelled out.

For instance, church growth in Germany ("Gemeindeaufbau") within the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (the Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches of Germany) has been called one of her three branches (EKD 1986: 62-72). It has received the reputation of leaving out the lower or more foundational existential questions of the human being and exclusively dealing with the "higher" needs like with the question of the meaning of life. The socio-political approach, a chief concern of another branch of the German Evangelische Kirche, is considered to focus on the "lower needs", thus being criticised by many church growth practitioners for its heavy emphasis on wellbeing in this life to the neglect of eternal dimensions or the meaning of life. While these are simplified perceptions, at least a kernel of truth should be assumed in both views.

On the other hand, the hypothesis of this study is radically different and goes as follows: Any missiological approach which does not consider the full range of human needs (according to Maslow's pyramid) falls too short.

Allocating the practice of different concerns to different wings in the church is often done in much the same manner as in politics. Social and political concerns are allocated to the "left wing" of the church, while an orientation toward evangelism and church growth are allocated to the "right wing". That this has

nothing to do with the wholistic approach of the gospel is too often not seen. Christian Schwarz (1990:31) describes this very well in looking at the tendency to split love into compartments:

"Manchen Menschen ist die Macht der Liebe geradezu unheimlich. Deshalb versuchen sie, die Liebe in Ketten zu legen. Man nimmt zwar nicht völlig Abschied vom christlichen Liebesbegriff, versucht aber, ihn nur auf bestimmte Bereiche des Lebens anzuwenden, während er für andere Bereiche ausgeklammert wird.

Wohin das führt, habe ich sehr lebhaft bei einer Veranstaltung auf dem evangelischen Kirchentag in Düsseldorf erlebt. Ich hatte dabei die Aufgabe übernommen, den Fernsehjournalisten Franz Alt zu interviewen, dessen Buch >Frieden ist möglich< kurz zuvor erschienen und innerhalb kürzester Zeit zum meistverkauften politischen Buch nach 1945 geworden war. Mit diesem Buch war Alt zu einem Idol der Friedensbewegung geworden.

Während unseres Interviews entfaltete er seine radikalen Thesen für den Frieden, und die Ovationen der 6.000 - fast ausschließlich friedensbewegten - Besucher waren ihm sicher. Tosender Applaus füllte die Messehalle. Da rief Alt in das noch applaudierende Publikum hinein: >Diese Position für das Leben ist genauso eine Position für das ungeborene Leben! Es ist kein Frieden in Deutschland, solange Abtreibung für viele eine Selbstverständlichkeit ist und überhaupt kein Problem mehr ...<

Der Applaus ebte abrupt ab. Buhrufe ertönten. Einige erregte Frauen wollten auf die Bühne, um ihr Entsetzen über das Mikrophon zu artikulieren.

Nach der Veranstaltung frage ich Franz Alt, wieso er sich derartig provozierend verhalten habe - er konnte doch ahnen, daß die Menge so reagieren würde. Alt lachte. >Natürlich weiß ich das. Aber mir scheint, das ist genau eine der vielen modernen Schizophrenien, daß man sich immer das aussucht, was einem gerade paßt, und nicht sehen will, daß die Botschaft Jesu ganzheitlich gemeint ist. Solange Aufrüstung ein linkes und Abtreibung ein rechtes Thema ist, haben wir noch nichts begriffen. Beiden Seiten geht es um das Leben, aber leider nur in Ausschnitten. Das macht den Kampf beider Seiten ebenso aussichtslos wie langweilig.<"

The implications for missiology should be obvious. Unfortunately the level of a need, i.e. whether such a need is physical, psychological or spiritual, determines whether it is a left wing or right wing concern, a concern for the diaconal, the socio-political or the evangelistic branch of the church. This seems to be highly questionable. When the approach does not consider the full spectrum of human needs, the question seems to be legitimate, if it is really motivated by love. The Greeks at least had a special expression for the apolitical person who believed that he or she could express love appropriately only in private: *idiotes* (cf Schwarz 1990:32)!

The contrast between the thinking of socio-political (or diaconal) oriented theologians and the church growth pastors in Germany

is not as sharp and colourful as those between liberationists and evangelistic oriented theologians in other countries because of the fact of how established human rights are already in these West European societies. How well they are truly established, for instance in postunified Germany with its new dimensions of unemployment and poverty, is a completely different question, which would not contribute to the goals of this study. At least the validity of *both*, the socio-political and the church growth approach is not questioned here. On the contrary, it is questioned only as long as it does not logically lead into the dimensions of the respective "other" approach. In fact, in light of this clearly visible need to consider the full spectrum of human needs, the logic of calling for a wider, more foundational wholistic approach, is only underlined.

The contrast is more colourful and better demonstrated when church growth is linked to liberation theologies dealing extensively with the human rights question in national contexts, where political achievements are far behind, in some cases even a full century behind the German human right context. Here a possible compatibility of theological foundations can be demonstrated, establishing a common theological ground as point of departure. It all leads to the point where the question will not be, "Church growth or socio-political action (in a Western European country), evangelism or liberation (in Eastern Europe or in a country of the Two Thirds-World)?", but rather "What does the context call for in relationship to the hierarchy of human needs?" This quest for a continuous common sense translation of faith and love as evidence for their existence explains why the Christian faith can be

considered to be essentially contextual in nature (cf Bosch 1991:421).

To consider this example further: The thought of a context oriented connection between church growth and liberation missiologies is not new. Emilio Castro (1985:8), the former General Secretary of the WCC and himself a liberation theologian, has conceptually linked liberation theology and church growth together already. Castro described church growth as a very helpful social tool as it makes the churches all the more useful as they live in solidarity with the poor. According to Castro, all people have the right to a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. He asks, "Who am I to decide who should be converted and who should not?". Therefore no one can say no to evangelism and to church growth. Theologically Castro sees no contradiction. Problems arise only if people fall for the temptation to be satisfied with rapid church growth, sidestepping questions where the kingdom of God is suffering violence.

How the connection of church growth and liberation could function, Castro demonstrates by the example of the churches in Korea. Their challenge is, as he states it, "to put all the gifts of the church, including its growth, at the service of the poor." He definitely welcomes church growth as long as it is seen as an invitation to participate in the total endeavour to shape society more in accordance with God's will and the pattern of God's kingdom, and as long as it does not aid a process which alienates people from the real dilemmas of society.

### 1.3 A SUGGESTED THEOLOGICAL KEY

The argument to work from the perspective of the full spectrum of human needs according to Maslow's famous hierarchy can be put on a very solid theological foundation. It is the German reformer Martin Luther who stated that the will of God comes to the human being in the form of the commandments. The most important and decisive commandment is the First. It calls for faith, to believe and love the one and true God. The person who does not put his or her trust in this God, commits sin. Faith will be properly exercised in thankfulness, in thanking and praising God. This Luther considered to be the only sacrifice of the New Covenant, the highest service to God. This is done as part of a life of petition and prayer. Calling upon the Lord within the needs of one's life is never optional for the Christian. The true faith is further proven in a desire to joyfully obey God's commandments.

The command to love God is joined by the command to love the neighbour. Actually these are not two different commandments, but one and the same. God does not need our work for himself, he needs it for our neighbour. Paul Althaus (1983:122-124) summarizes the main points of Luther's interpretation of the First Commandment, partly quoting Luther himself:

"Wie Gott unmittelbar von mir nichts anderes will and braucht als meinen Glauben, so bedarf auch ich Gott gegenüber nichts anderes zur Seligkeit, als daß ich im Glauben seine Huld empfange, die mein Heil ist. Ich bedarf nichts mehr zur Seligkeit. Aber mein Nächster bedarf meines

Werkes, er hat noch nicht genug. Um seinetwillen, nicht in eigener Sache, nicht um meiner Seligkeit willen habe ich mit meinem Leben meinem Nächsten zu dienen. So soll niemand sein Leben für sich selber leben. >Es ist ein jeder Mensch um des andern willen geschaffen und geboren.< Das bedeutet: ein jeder ist für die Liebe, für den Dienst am Nächsten geboren. >Alles, was wir haben, muß stehen im Dienst; wo es nicht im Dienst stehet, so stehts im Raub.< Diene ich meinem Nächsten nicht mit allem, was ich habe, so raube ich ihm das, was ihm von mir nach Gottes Willen zusteht. ... Das gilt nun in der ganzen Breite des Lebens und umfaßt alles, was meinem Nächsten >not, nütze und seliglich< ist. Es reicht vom äußeren Helfen bis zum innersten Eintreten. Dem Nächsten gehört all unser Besitz, soweit er nicht zur Fristung des eigenen Lebens für uns nötig ist. >Das man übrig hat und dem Nächsten nicht hilft, das besitzt man mit Unrecht und ist gestohlen vor Gott, denn vor Gott ist man schuldig zu geben, leihen und sich nehmen lassen.< ... Alles, was ich habe, gehört dem Nächsten. Aller Reichtum soll zu denen fließen, die arm sind. Die Liebe hebt die Distanz von gerecht und Sünder auf. Der Gerechte will nirgendwo anders stehen als bei dem Sünder. Die Liebe ist Gütergemeinschaft und Lastengemeinschaft. Ich trage mit an den Lasten meines Nächsten und gebe ihm Teil an dem, was mir von Gott gegeben ist. Ich soll vor Gott nirgendwo anders stehen als bei ihm, dem Belasteten, Gefallenen, Schuldigen, ja, an seiner Stelle und für ihn. So ist die Liebe allezeit volles Eintreten für den anderen mit allem, was ich habe, und damit zugleich grenzenlose Stellvertretung, stellvertretendes brüderliches



Eingehen in seine Lage. Alles in allem: es gilt, daß du dich deinem Nächsten >ganz ergibst und ihm dienest, wo er dein bedarf und du vermagst<, bis hin zum Leiden und Sterben für ihn."

The consequences of this love of God and neighbour as described above necessitates a wholistic missiological approach, which makes room for a variety of contextual responses to the neighbour's need.

The question needs to be raised, can anybody produce this faith and love on his own? Is not this faith and love received from the source, God himself, in the community of the believers in worship, the proclamation of his word, the celebration of communion, where God gives himself away freely in bread and wine? Is not the coming together of the church to worship God and receive from him as the source this much needed faith and love both, a part of her mission and a prerequisite for her service in society, the actual application of this faith and love in everyday life? Does not this make the concern for the church and her upbuilding, development and growth so valid, so that this "happening", God becoming the source for faith, love and strength should not be made available to as many humans as possible?

This "receiving part" should then lead very naturally to the giving part: the common sense translation of this received love of Christ in everyday life. And this will mean the consideration of the real context of the individual person one meets. As a very real application of Martin Luther's interpretation of the First

^Commandment it will mean an assisting that person in all physical, psychological and/or spiritual aspects.

On the larger national scale of defining a "context" for ministry for a whole region or country, it should be expected that an individual person one meets might be in a *different* context of need than the majority of the people. Flexibility needs to be built "into the system" so that love can always be translated into the context of each individual situation. This flexibility appears to have the potential to solve the problems of the limitations of at least some contextual theologies.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE TASK OF MISSIOLOGY**

A fresh look at church growth is attempted while searching for a wholistic missiological frame, which should give a natural and rightful place to church growth together with other missiological approaches. For this a very basic consideration of the task of missiology seems to be necessary. The question, whether church growth is fulfilling the criteria for missiology as other contextual theologies do, can be answered only by reviewing accepted definitions of missiology and mission.

### **2.1 MISSIOLOGY'S ROLE: REFLECTION LEADING TO ACTION**

The question for the reasons for this search for a wholistic missiological approach in which church growth can have a rightful and undebated place together with other contextual theologies at *this point in time* might arise. It has to be realized that (a) missiology is a relatively young science, roughly a century old, (b) church growth missiology is even much younger, roughly half a century old, and (c) the ecumenical/evangelical debates on church growth have been going on for only a few decades and are still in process.

The church has always been engaged in mission. From her earliest days she has proved to be missionary in nature. But missiology, as a science of mission, has been a rather late development. The origins are dated back to Karl Graul's initial attempt to introduce the scientific study of missions by a presentation which led to his appointment as a private lecturer at the University of

Erlangen in 1864 (Verkuyt 1978:12). But it was Gustav Warneck then, a little later, who was attributed the greater pioneer importance for the academic study of mission. Warneck, while teaching at the University of Halle from 1896 to 1908, developed the first systematic mission theology ("Evangelische Missionslehre") (Verkuyt 1978:13).

Bavinck (1960:XI-XII) describes the striking fact that the church preached the gospel for many centuries before it gave profound consideration to the character of its commission. He considers this development as a procedure quite usual in actual life. While a person is motivated to action by strong impulses, it is only later when problems are encountered which improvising cannot solve, that a more systematic reflection on the nature of the task begins. Bavinck points out that science in general is in many ways such an outgrowth and function of life by which it is ever stimulated. The development of the science of mission is no exception.

For the ancient church missionary work was conducted as though it were self-explanatory. According to Bavinck, the question for the "why of mission" certainly was not in the center of attention. Neither was the need seen to subject its methods to criticism. In fact, the spontaneous nature of the church's testimony did not require a thought out basis. God's Word itself had commanded the work, so why theorizing about it further? This would have even been regarded as folly. Bavinck considered the questions regarding the future progress of mission as the stimulant for a systematization of her course of action.

Since the biblical days, in which the apostles provided the leadership for the mission of the church (cf Cairns 1967:59-74, Bosch 1991:123-178), this leadership role was filled by missionaries and other church leaders through the centuries. Even at the advent of missiology, the science of mission, its role was not necessarily perceived as a leadership function, a theoretical systematization *leading* to concrete practical action, but rather a more exclusive engagement in theoretical reflection for the church, "justifying its course of action", to use Bavinck's words.

This should not surprise as in some of the more prominent definitions of missiology the emphasis is on "study". The definition of missiology suggested by the Dutch missiologist Verkuyl clearly reflects an understanding of mission as missio Dei. But he gives special consideration to responsibility of the church as she partakes in God's own mission. As the broad perspective of mission is his concept of missio Dei, the boundaries on the human side make it to be a missio ecclesiarum. Verkuyl (1978:5) defines missiology as the study of the salvation activities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit throughout the world with the aim of bringing the kingdom of God into existence. He then goes on "narrowing" the study of the missio Dei down to a study of missio ecclesiarum. This perspective leads missiology to become the *study* of the worldwide church's divine mandate in participating in the salvific activities of God by being available to serve him who is aiming his saving acts toward this world. The statement that the church in dependence on the Holy Spirit is to communicate the total gospel and the total divine law by word and

deed to all humankind might suggest that for Verkuyl missiology needs to lead from reflection to action. But then he goes on emphasizing the research part of missiology, the scientific and critical investigation of the presuppositions, motives, structures, methods, patterns of cooperation, and leadership which the churches bring to their mandate. But missiology should not stop with the work of the church. According to Verkuyl (1978:5), an additional responsibility of missiology is the examination "of every other type of human activity which combats the various evils to see if it fits the criteria and goals of God's kingdom which has both already come and is yet coming."

Bavinck (1960: XVII-XVIII) describes as missiology's areas of concern (a) the concept of mission (the English translation of his book reads "missions"); (b) the task of the church, as established in the scriptures; (c) the history and problems of mission. Bavinck sees the science of mission to be preoccupied with every possible condition and circumstance, at home and abroad, as long as it relates to the aspect of "having been sent" of the church. As Christ was sent by the Father, so the church is sent by Christ. He particularly mentions the importance of the theology of mission, the need for the aspect of this having been sent to be clarified by the word of God at every point (1).

But Kierkegaard (in Gensichen 1971:251) saw the danger of the missiologist to be merely a theoretician, a distanced (perhaps critical?) observer of the missionary. This he considered to be quite regrettable.

"In seinen Tagebüchern findet sich, immer wieder abgewandelt, die Entgegensetzung des >Apostels< und des >Professors<. Der Apostel, Zeuge der Kreuzigung Christi, trägt seinem Herrn ganz buchstäblich das Kreuz nach und wird darum schließlich selbst gekreuzigt. Der Professor dagegen, ebenfalls Augenzeuge der Kreuzigung, beschränkt sich auf distanzierte Reflexion des Geschehens und stirbt eines sanften Todes."

The solution Kierkegaard envisioned was not only a combination of the more theoretical with the more practical, reflection leading to action, but he preferred these two dimensions to be unified in one person. It is the personified union of apostle and professor, the missiologist who is a missionary as well (in Gensichen 1971: 153). The expected outcome of combining theoretical reflection with practical work is an increased, informed, and - because of that - perhaps simply better leadership to the church as she engages in mission.

This whole train of thought that missiology ought not only to engage in theoretical reflection, but indeed assists leadership by providing orientation in regards to "doing theology", is stated by Saayman (1992:14) in reference to contextual theology in very clear terms. He describes the science and the practice of mission to be vitally important to each other. In fact, since missiological reflection can never take the place of active missionary work, which must in turn stimulate missiological reflection, these two should never be separated.

Saayman points to the danger of isolating missiology as academic exercise from missionary practice, the same concern Kierkegaard had. Reliable insight cannot ever be achieved by means of an uncommitted missiology that isolates itself in some ivory tower. To be reliable, it has to be attained only through personal experience, effort and discovery (2).

Beaver (in Verkuyl 1978:407), the father of American missiologists, deals with this same theme, the interrelatedness between missionary and missiologist. Perhaps Beaver's statement carries the idea of the missiologist's responsibility to *provide leadership* clearer than any other statement. He sees the calling of the missionary as that of a pioneer and a trial-blazer. But the missionary will not escape his uncertainty, and the church will not move ahead in >mission< unless the missiologist points the way and sounds the prophetic call. It should not be overlooked that Beaver seems to stand in contrast to Bavinck who said that the church moved ahead in mission long before anything like missiology came into being. But here Bavinck's view of the "science of missions" (as he preferred to call it) can be challenged. Are not clear elements of a systematic missiology observable with the Apostle Paul (cf Bosch 1991:123ff)? Did not Martin Luther have a clear theology of the *missio Dei* (cf Scherer 1987:51ff)? Did not John Calvin develop a very clear concept of the church's involvement in society, even if he did not call it missiology (cf Cairns 1967:339)?

It is interesting indeed to see how consistent this complimentary nature of mission and missiology, of action and reflection is



treated in missiological literature. The essence of Kierkegaard's idea of "apostle" and "professor" can be found again with Verkuyl (1978:408). For him, "there is no participation in the crucified and risen Lord without participation in the missionary task, here, there and everywhere." Consequently, Verkuyl sees it as imperative for the missiologist's work he calls his fellow Christians to participation, but not without his own participation to offer himself an example.

Gensichen (1971:251) balances the more theoretical with the more practical aspect by ascribing two different functions to missiology within the total frame of theology. Missiology reflects the faith particularly as faith for the world. This she accomplishes by keeping open the dimensional relationship to the world ("dimensionaler Weltbezug") as constituted by the *missio Dei*. On the other hand she is responsible for the intentional concretization as practiced by the mission of the church. Both functions include the critical moment, criticism towards theology as well as criticism towards the church (3).

## 2.2 HOW DOES CHURCH GROWTH RELATE TO THIS UNDERSTANDING OF THE TASK OF MISSIOLOGY?

It is the intention of church growth missiologists themselves to combine theoretical reflection with practical leadership (cf McGavran 1980:3-56). While the conciliar and evangelical movements ("Geneva" and "Lausanne") respectively provide impulses for missiological leadership through their world conferences and the documents they produce (4), church growth in many respects has

come in between the fronts. It is more than clear that the ecumenical and evangelical positions do not always converge, i.e. their theological frames are not always compatible with each other. As by virtue of historical developments church growth missiology has been used more in evangelical than in ecumenical circles, it has to be remembered that the church growth school provides hermeneutical keys and research methods which are not in itself necessarily incompatible with foundational positions of either the ecumenical or evangelical movements. Church growth in this regard is very much comparable to contextual theologies (i.e. political theology, theology of development, liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, etc.). Many of them are not so isolated as, for instance, some Latin American liberation theologies with a strong ideological Marxist connection, which by many are considered incompatible with main streams of ecumenical and evangelical theology (To differentiate between these streams as two theologies is certainly a simplified distinction, used for orientation's sake, even if it appears to be a crutch).

In fact, church growth methodology (particularly as a research tool) is believed to be neutral enough to become a contextual missiology in the fullest sense of the term, as stated in the beginning of this study.

McGavran built his own strong personal theological convictions into his approach of church growth, making his own church growth theory to be only one of many possible approaches. Whether that was intended by him or not is not the question here. It is a matter of fact that many different church growth theories have been developed since, many of which are distant from McGavran's

paradigm. It is also regrettable that McGavran specified his theory to such an extent, that it led to an identification of his personal theory with the total methodology. This has been to church growth's detriment, though psychologically understandable, as many observers - missiologists of both the ecumenical and evangelical camps - started to identify, even confuse church growth methodology with McGavranism. So the challenge will be proposed to treat church growth openmindedly despite of areas of disagreements with church growth authors one encounters, and to follow the invitation to become engaged in developing wholistic church growth concepts. This study aims at inspiring such concepts. It is of help to acknowledge the fact that in many respects church growth still is an open theory of missiology (cf Costas 1974:149). The challenge for developing such concepts is to make church growth an integral part of a more wholistic missiological approach, where it becomes compatible with and logically connected to other missiologies. The self-understanding of church growth methodology to move from reflection to action is an advantage in this undertaking in light of the previously discussed descriptions of the task of missiology.

### **2.3 A WORKING DEFINITION OF MISSION**

After having "established" some classical expectations towards the role of the missiologist, it is important to realize that this role can be fulfilled only within a clear understanding of mission. This in turn will determine the working definition for missiology as well as the own job description. No new

missiological approach can be attempted or searched for without very precise definitions of both, mission and missiology.

Two definitions of mission will be suggested, one of the *missio Dei*, the mission of the triune God which the church is called to participate in, and the other a definition of the *missio ecclesiarum*, the mission of the church. The idea almost suggests itself that a definition of *missio ecclesiarum*, the mission of the church, lends itself as a working definition of mission for a study concerned with church growth. But the definition sought for is one which does not just have to fit church growth, but one which has to fit to a more general missiological approach and therefore to other missiologies as sub-approaches, dealing with different aspects of Maslow's hierarchy of needs as well. That it is the church's mission, the *missio ecclesiarum*, to participate in the *missio Dei*, the mission of God, should be accepted as a basic premise and cannot be substantiated in detail here. But the critical category of the church as important place where faith in Jesus and the love of God are received, has been established in the first chapter. Therefore a definition of the *missio ecclesiarum* will be suggested first, followed by a definition of the *missio Dei*.

"Mission is, in fact, the totality of the task *God* has sent his *Church* to do in the world" (Bosch 1983b:36).

This definition would not in any way present a problem to most church growth protagonists. This might be different with the definition suggested by Prof. Saayman, which has very much grown

out of an ecumenical understanding of mission. As evangelism is a high priority item in much church growth literature, the negation of this priority in Saayman's definition will in all likelihood be a stumbling block not only to some church growth missiologists, but for all evangelicals, who are strong protagonists of this priority of evangelism within mission (cf Stott 1975:35-37). Furthermore, it is not surprising that many of those holding to a kerygmatic model of mission might have difficulties with this definition (5) including those in the tradition of Walter Holsten (Verkuyl 1978:30). But now Saayman's (1991:5) definition:

"Perhaps I can illustrate my understanding of mission in the light of Luke 4:18-21 by using the image of a rainbow. The rainbow always reflects the full spectrum of colours, wherever we may be. These colours belong together, and if one were to be lacking, we no longer have a real rainbow. In the same way the various dimensions of the task of the Spiritfilled Messiah - and therefore of those whom he empowers to be his followers (John 20:21) - reflect the fulness of the missio Dei. In correspondence with the tasks of the Messiah, I want to define these dimensions as an evangelising dimension; a healing dimension; and a dimension of striving for social, political and economic justice. These dimensions belong together, whether we are involved in mission in Berlin or Soweto or Pretoria. There is no inherent priority among them - the one is as important as the other, so that the context must determine the priority. Furthermore, if one of these dimensions is completely lacking from our mission, we are no longer involved in the

mission of the Messiah of God. This does not mean that in every instance we must at the same time be both proclaiming liberty to the captives and restoring sight to the blind; both preaching good news to the poor and setting free the oppressed. It does mean, though, that if, at the end of the day, our mission is evaluated in its entirety, it must reflect the fulness, the whole spectrum of colours of the rainbow. And like the overarching rainbow, the *missio Dei* is the horizon underneath which the Christian community lives and works, the horizon spanning and illuminating every activity in the life and being of the church. Understood in this way, mission is not some peripheral idiosyncrasy which can be left to some little group of enthusiasts (or crackpots!), nor is it some quaint relic of the colonial past which, thank God, we can now lay to rest forever; rather it becomes, as it should be, central to the life and being of the church" (6).

Bosch's definition of mission is worthwhile noting because it underlines the instrumentality of the church, indicating her missionary nature. But it is too brief for the purposes of this study. As a working definition for a wholistic missiological approach, Saayman's definition seems to be more useful. The biggest strength here is the request to let the problems of a given context determine the appropriate mission response. Thus it makes room to let the one engaged in mission deal with the specific human need, leaving the full spectrum of human needs according to Maslow's hierarchy open. As, for instance, the socio-political dimension could be central, leading to a liberation

theology approach of mission (7), so evangelism could be the central dimension in another context, leading to a kerygmatic approach in mission. This of course also matches the requirement of the First Commandment, to translate the love of Christ directly into the context of the neighbour's actual need.

Perhaps one aspect should be added. Love will always try to meet the neighbour's need in such a way that this person will automatically move up one step according to Maslow's pyramid. The automatic consequence will be perceived need on a higher level. It is therefore consequential if the attempt aims at helping that person to the top, where the perceived need will be self-actualization. Since on this level questions about the meaning of life are dealt with, it will entail the evangelization dimension. If this is logical and true, a person's needs should always be met to such a point that evangelism eventually becomes the central dimension. Instead of a priority of evangelism within mission, evangelism becomes an important goal of mission. To become able to deal with questions of transcendency becomes the yardstick which shows how effective the other dimensions of mission have been fulfilled. In such a frame of thinking, the poor have become the yardstick for true love, while a movement toward evangelism has become a yardstick for the effectiveness of mission.

There is also a theological reason why Saayman's definition of mission fits a wholistic missiological approach. In all probability it will be acceptable for many ecumenicals, since Saayman is using Luke 4 as his scriptural point of departure, as often done in ecumenical missiology. This will only help in an

attempt to demonstrate that church growth methodology is compatible with an ecumenical understanding of theology and mission (8).



**CHAPTER 3: UNITY BY ATTITUDE - THE PREREQUISITE FOR THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF WHOLISTIC APPROACHES**

**3.1 CHURCH GROWTH MISSIOLOGY ENDANGERED BY THE  
ECUMENICAL/EVANGELICAL POLARIZATION**

One theme which has been assigned a place of prominence over the last decades is the one on the unity of the church. The relationship of advocates and critics of the church growth school towards each other can be characterised by this word (unity) only in exceptional circumstances. Gensichen (1971:136) pointed out that the polarization between evangelical and ecumenical missions corresponds at least partly to the contradiction between McGavran and his critics. That ecumenicals tend not to listen to church growth missiologists any more should be understood in light of some of the weaknesses in the theoretical undergirdings of some church growth theories. Furthermore, the fact that McGavran has placed church growth firmly into the evangelical movement and that he has not used all of his possibilities as minister of the (ecumenical) Church of Christ to place it into the ecumenical movement as well (cf Verkuyl 1978:67) should not be underestimated. On the other hand the frequent unwillingness on the side of ecumenicals to listen to what church growth missiology has to offer, an unwillingness to reevaluate its possibilities to develop more wholistic church growth concepts has to be criticised as well. In fact, this unwillingness to listen to - and to be enriched by - the other conviction has to receive sharper criticism. The willingness to listen, this "unity by attitude", is so crucial in light of John 17:21 to the unity of the World

Church, which happens to be made up of ecumenicals, evangelicals, Roman Catholics, etc.

And isn't it the role of the missiologists to lead the way in the unity of the church by providing themselves as examples of gulf bridging and convergent thinking? This "attitude of unity" is certainly a basic requirement for those who search for and emphasize the possibilities of making missiologies compatible with each other, which in turn might result in a more wholistic missiological approach.

Since there is too much valuable church growth thinking endangered to get under the wheels of the ecumenical/evangelical polarization, some historical facts concerning the development of unity, convergent thinking and polarization with the main Christian streams shall be given.

### **3.2 UNITY VERSUS DISSENT BETWEEN CHRISTIAN MAIN CAMPS**

In the middle of this century the Dutch missiologist Hoekendijk has pointed out that the mission and the unity of the church cannot be studied separately from each other any longer (cf Verkuy1 1978:14). The fundamental theological link between unity and mission is generally accepted as self-evident and shall not be examined here (cf Saayman 1984:3-4). The two major wings of worldwide Protestantism, the so-called ecumenical and evangelical movements with strong overlaps in membership in their representing organisations (World Council of Churches and World Evangelical Fellowship) have both been founded on the assumption of the need

of unity. But both camps have had their strongest problems regarding unity in relationship with the respective other camp. The debates between the ecumenical and evangelical movements on questions regarding the definition of the mission of the church, its priorities and the scope of salvation are some of the topics, which have occupied the seventies, exemplifying the ongoing debates and increasing tensions between these camps. The questions under discussion in these main themes are often perceived to relate to tendencies of reducing the mission of the church to either the evangelistic mandate or to a socio-political role, and to reduce salvation either to the vertical and eternal dimension or to temporal well-being in the socio-economic context.

### **3.3 FAILURE OF WORLD MISSION CONFERENCES TO KEEP A SPIRIT OF UNITY**

World conferences of churches were convened on the shared assumption that unity is needed to reach the world for Christ. The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, with its emphasis on "strategy" to fulfil the "unfinished task" of the Great Commission as churches together, led to the Faith and Order movement with its emphasis on the link between Christian unity and world evangelization. This continued into the formation of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948 by merging with the Life and Work movement (Scherer 1987:14-18). Therefore it would be no overstatement to say that mission gave birth to unity between churches by way of world conferences to a considerable degree. But these conferences also manifested existing disunity on theological lines: Uppsala 1968 with its emphasis on "humanization" serves as

a good example of a process of polarization set in motion. Even prior to the conference a nervous reaction to the conference announcement from Donald McGavran was registered, who at that time already had become known as the leading voice of the church growth movement: "Will Uppsala betray the two billion?". This foreshadows the growing rift between ecumenicals and evangelicals (Scherer 1987:121). It is true, Uppsala did mark a milestone in ecumenical missionary thinking. But a climax reached in the development of *missio Dei* based on the world as the locus of God's mission certainly brought about serious tensions with the evangelicals within and without the WCC (cf Scherer 1987:119).

The resulting debate between ecumenicals and evangelicals shall be neglected here. Suffice it to say that even a prominent WCC member, the President of the Reformed Church of America, Harvey Hoekstra (1979:3), spoke of "the demise of evangelism with the World Council of Churches". Even at the WCC conference in Nairobi in 1975 the Lutheran Church of Norway, charter member of the WCC, representing an evangelical position, threatened to reconsider their membership (cf Hoekstra 1979:141).

It took different world mission conferences convened by the representative organisations of the Christian main streams (ecumenical, evangelical and Roman Catholic) to overcome the rift and to come to certain points of convergence, to a place, where common ground was emphasized rather than dividing distinctives (World Evangelical Fellowship: Lausanne 1974, Roman Catholic Bishop's Synod: Rome 1974, World Council of Churches: Nairobi 1975). Continuous effort at these conventions to overcome disunity

was rewarded with a consensus reached at Bangkok, Lausanne and Rome. It relates to salvation at three points: (a) the affirmation of its comprehensive nature, (b) the recognition of the eschatological basis for historical action, and (c) the understanding of the church as the sign and bearer of salvation in the world, according to Thomas (in Scherer 1987:128).

Different "camps" and "schools" within Christianity are an empirical reality and are not negative in themselves regarding the unity of the church. The condition is that the adherents of the different camps keep an openmindedness towards and willingness to listen to those of the other camps despite their clearly acknowledged points of differences. Here different world conferences have done a fabulous service, as described above. However, developments since then have unfortunately again led to polarizations, especially between the ecumenical and evangelical camps.

#### **3.4 THE SOLUTION: UNITY AS ATTITUDE - A WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN**

Sundermeier points to the two world mission conferences held during 1989 in San Antonio, (USA) and Manila (Philippines) as events making it clear once more to the world at large that mission is dividing people instead of uniting them. The reason for this is the simple fact that mission agencies are divided by a profound theological schism. According to Sundermeier, the attempts from diverse camps to heal this rift have yet to produce positive results. The primary reconciling effect seems to come by the efforts of a handful of individual missiologists and

missionaries, who are at home in both camps. By virtue of their personal prestige they seem to be able to moderate the force of the collision between the opposing factions at least to some degree.

Since the Christian world church happens to be manifested in different camps, there can be only one interpretation: As much as the world conferences have served to focus on the unity of the church, they have failed so far to keep "a spirit of unity" and preventing the camps from drifting apart from each other.

If Hoekendijk was correct in saying that the mission and the unity of the church cannot be studied separately any longer, then it is not sufficient that chairs of missiology and ecumenical studies at university faculties of theology are merged, or at least closely related to one another (Verkuyl 1978:14). If this remains the only thing done, it appears to be not much more than a cosmetic measure. Additionally, fresh attention should be focused on possible keys to overcome these polarization of the camps. Since world mission conferences were not able to keep the unity of the church either through structural unity or through an emphasis of convergent streams of thinking, it appears to be the essence of Sundermeier's suggestion that individual persons, leaders of the church, missiologists, missionaries, etc. will have to serve as role models. It is the handful of individual missiologists and missionaries Sundermeier referred to who personally reflect convergent thinking, and who embody "unity" in their attitude. It is the weight of Sundermeier's critical contribution to this discussion, which he makes as a respected professor of missiology

at the University of Heidelberg, that his argument will be quoted in full.

"Questions pertaining to church unity preoccupied mission theology from the outset. It was the mission movement that provided the initial thrust to the ecumenical quest for church unity. Under the growing pressure of modernity with its universal, functionalist tendency, Jesus thinking about church unity (John 17) fell victim to functionalistic misinterpretation. As a result the effect of organisational church unity was considerably overestimated. This is not to say that the scandal of Christian disunity may ever be underestimated, but we should not make the mistake of thinking that even one Muslim would be any better persuaded to become a Christian by the merging of two churches. When the idea of unity is functionalised, it loses its meaning. When unity is limited to organisational or structural dimensions, its real meaning is lost from view. This confronts a hermeneutic missiology with completely new challenges. The idea of unity must be reconceived in terms of its relation to the other. Unity is not an organisational, nor a functional determinant; rather it means the enabling of mutual acceptance, of being with the other, of living together in >convivial< togetherness. Only when the churches realise that they must learn from each other, that they need one another in their search for truth, will it become possible for them as learning communities to become helping communities which will also cast themselves

in a new mould as a celebrating community. Only in this way will unity acquire its new meaning" (Sundermeier 1990:267).

The reasons that we are beyond the convergence in the missiological issues stated above, which was reached during the mid-seventies, and particularly the fact that the rift between the ecumenical and evangelical movements is growing, are crucial enough for the theme of the unity of the church to receive fresh attention. Here only a few personal observations can be stated on the assumption that they have some validity.

If unity is not an organisational, nor a functional determinant, but rather means the enabling of mutual acceptance, of being with the other, of living together in >convivial< togetherness, then unity is basically a matter of personal attitude, which, when lived out by diverse people, can form the climate of a church and between churches. If renewed focus is on those missiologists, missionaries, who display this attitude, it is very likely that they might serve as role models for convergent thinking as well. It certainly calls for a reexamination of one's own attitude towards a self-critical openmindedness. And it further invites (a) a reevaluation of rejected missiological approaches, and (b) a search for the points of truth in them that stimulates an improvement of these concepts at the points of their weaknesses.

What is rightfully to be expected in terms of a positive climate of interaction between the missiologists of different schools, and what too often is simply not the case, is actually something, which is expected of any believer in terms of personal



contribution to the climate of the church as fellowship of believers. Koch (in Hanselmann et al. 1987:78) underlines the need of the Christian for fellowship with other believers, in which (a) everybody offers his or her own individualization of the truths of faith as an aid for understanding, (b) everybody accepts the very special problems of the faith of the other, and (c) everybody can receive the confirmation of his or her faith from the other.

Hanselmann et al. (1978:78-79) describe this point of the church as learning fellowship (Lerngemeinschaft) as well as conciliar fellowship. Foundational for this is the insight that the Christian truth is before, above and beyond all individual, positional and confessional attempts at internalization. Everyone needs the other as aid for understanding. It is observable in each personal biography regardless of the most different circumstances of life in diverse social levels, milieus and cultural backgrounds that different viewpoints and attitudes, which are miles apart from each other, all have a certain content of truth in them. Those insights are partly complimentary, partly contradictory, but can only be rightfully perceived from the individual position. If the church is considered as a learning fellowship or a conciliar fellowship, then it can only mean that Christians from individual circumstances of life, different historically grown confessions and internal confessional positions, do not isolate themselves from each other. Instead they bring their individual moments of truth into play with the goal to learn from each other and to grow through the other, and to draw closer to the truth which nobody owns exclusively or completely, but to which everybody stands in debt.

To request this attitude from the worldwide fellowship of missiologists and ecumenecists is therefore not too much, certainly it is not something extraordinary.

### 3.5 AN EXAMPLE OF THE WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN: CHURCH GROWTH IN RELATIONSHIP TO LIBERATION THEOLOGIES

A struggle with the "compatibility question" of church growth missiology with liberation theologies might serve as an example of what has been established so far. The question is whether liberation theology and church growth are compatible in terms of an wholistic missiological approach or mutually exclusive. It relates to the question of how one might logically lead to the other, liberation to church growth or vice versa. It is thus an attempt at convergent thinking. Furthermore, it is the task of missiology applied, it exemplifies the quest for reflection leading to action. And last but not least it necessitates an attitude of unity.

The question as to what in all the world liberation theology has to do with a discussion on church growth represents the momentary stagnation in discussion on church growth in many missiological circles. When the possibility of a development of diverse church growth theories is evaluated, liberation theology might serve as a helpful comparison. The fact that missiologists often speak about liberation *theologies* in the plural is an indication of a real diversity in liberation thought. Many of them are quite unidentical to each other. For instance, some Latin American liberation theologians are Marxists in ideology, which basically

rules out any common ground with a Christian faith perspective, if it is remembered that Karl Marx considered religion to be opium for the people. On the other hand many South African liberation theologians only apply Marxist social analysis, but working strictly from a faith perspective. The difference between both type of liberationists is enormous. This stands against the widespread popular misconception that there is only one (Latin American) Marxist liberation theology in existence. Out of this ignorance many theologians, evangelicals and ecumenicals alike, reject liberation theology, some for conservative theological, others for conservative, at least anti-Marxist political views, or a combination of both. The different liberation theologies did develop from a common original idea. The same misconception exists in relationship to church growth. Many believe that a church growth protagonist has to stand for everything McGavran originally presented. But this is far from being true. As "liberation theologian" does not automatically equal Marxist, so church growth protagonist does not equal "McGavranist". So as was the case with liberation theologies, it is suggested that radically different church growth missiologies might develop from a common original root (McGavran) as well.

As different liberation theologies have been developed as contextual theologies with quite different theological and ideological connections, even with different interlocutors (Kritzinger 1992:302-303), it is conceivable to develop church growth missiologies which are indeed different from each other as well. So as Gustavo Gutierrez, the "father" of (Latin American) liberation theology - if we recognize the early rise of James

Cone's Black Theology in USA - (cf Kritzinger 1992a:249), is considered the first pioneer of liberation theology at large, the "common root" of all liberation theologies, he does not stand for all streams of thought within these theologies. In the same manner Donald McGavran as first pioneer of church growth and as "common root" of all other church growth theories, he does not stand for everything in all other church growth theories. The opposite is true, one can hold quite different theological convictions than McGavran did and belong to a different camp within Christianity.

And as South African liberation theologians do not refuse to listen to Latin American liberation theologians, even to those with a strong Marxist connection, as Kritzinger's (1992:262) references to Ernesto Cardenal exemplify, communication with the American church growth school might protect one from reinventing the wheel. In order to do this, it does not mean that it necessitates a certain theological frame as McGavran had invited the "user" of church growth to make it compatible with his or her own theology.

The thought that different church growth theories are expected to develop is not new. Dr. Ako Haarbeck (1986:18f), the respected leading superintendent of one of the regional German Reformed churches (Lippische Landeskirche) and respected member of the council of the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD), the national umbrella organization of the regional churches, brought it up in his outspoken criticism of "Theologie des Gemeindeaufbaus - Ein Versuch" (Theology of Church Growth - An Attempt) by Fritz and Christian Schwarz. He welcomed their attempt as one of diverse

possibilities of church growth theory. The warm recognition of their effort as well as the goal of his criticisms clearly indicate the proposal for further attempts to follow.

"Zunächst gilt es, den Grundimpuls der Herner Autoren festzuhalten: >Zum Gemeindeaufbau gibt es keine Alternative< (Vorwort). Diesem Satz stimme ich vorbehaltlos zu. Ich halte es für ein nicht hoch genug zu bewertendes Verdienst von Fritz und Christian Schwarz, daß sie die Frage nach Theologie und Praxis des Gemeindeaufbaus so nachdrücklich auf die Tagesordnung gesetzt haben. Gegen die verbreitete Resignation in der Kirche, gegen lähmende Frustration und aktionistische Verzettlung, gegen die Gefahr bloßer >Christentumsverwaltung< oder kirchlicher Routiniertheit wird hier ein klares Konzept gestellt, das nach vorn weist. Dieses Konzept hat, alles in allem, guten biblischen Grund. Ob der gute biblische Grund etwas reichlichen, sozusagen unbiblischen Dünger bekommen hat, wird zu prüfen sein. Die Autoren haben ihre >Theologie des Gemeindeaufbaus< schon im Untertitel ausdrücklich als >Versuch< gekennzeichnet. Kritik ist also um der Sache des Gemeindeaufbaus willen erwünscht. Meine Überlegungen wollen als ein Beitrag zum kritischen Gespräch verstanden werden."

Now a few distinguishing features of liberation theology (instead of "theologies" the singular is used to refer to the general paradigm). They serve as contrast to some features of church growth missiology, and indicate a few areas where the one approach might logically lead to the other in the effort to meet human

needs.

The contrast between liberation theology and church growth missiology is evidenced by that fact that liberation theologies are primarily developing in situations where most of the people are Christians already (Kritzinger 1992a:293f, 300). The existence and presence of many Christians in a certain place is (almost) a prerequisite to the work liberation theology calls for. Church growth, on the other hand, has evangelization, people to become Christians and become responsible members of churches, as a primary concern. So church growth can start the work with a Christian population of zero, liberation theology cannot. But even at the stage where the evangelistic dimension of church growth is the best contextual approach, the question should be considered if not liberation theologians have something to offer to those at work in church growth. In countries where the human rights question is a matter of major concern, the socio-political dimension of mission might be an integral part of evangelism from the very first beginnings of mission in a certain country. But even if human rights won't become a central concern, liberation theologians are lending themselves as excellent interlocutors. They could ask helpful penetrating questions to church growth missiologists. They would contribute very valuable insights for the *conceptual* dimension of church growth theory. A good example might be the Basic Christian Communities in Latin America, although the social and cultural contexts may differ greatly, which try to "reinvent" the churches as living and liberating organisms among the wretched of the earth (Kritzinger 1992a:300). But even in Germany churches are being developed which integrate

important element from both, liberation theology as well as church growth. Andreas Ebert (1992:229-234), deputy director of the Evangelical Lutheran College in Celle, Germany reports the growth of a "sub-church", a basic Christian community having grown out of a "Third-World-Shop", which is connected with the Lutheran church next door. This community is reaching and incorporating people the mother church has never reached, and has developed quite an independent church life of her own. And this is not the only creative approach like this under the Protestant umbrella organization EKD. It is worthwhile to keep this purposefully under consideration.

A next most important point is the feature of the method of social analysis. Contextual and liberation theologies have frequently been accused of having surrendered the gospel to Marxist ideology (cf Bosch 1991:440), as mentioned earlier already. But here general Marxist ideology is confused with Marxist social analysis. David Bosch (1991:441), surprisingly for many, could not see any problem with using Marxist theory as a tool in social analysis. As such he saw it of tremendous value. The point of departure for Bosch was, however, whether some proponents of liberation theology have not gone beyond the use of Marxist social analysis by adopting Marxist ideology as well. The question is, whether this can be deemed compatible with the Christian faith.

Realizing that Marxist analysis appears to be declining in Latin America, and that it has been vigorously introduced into South African Black Theology since about 1981, the difference between

Marxist theory as a tool in social analysis and Marxist ideology has become a very important differentiation mark.

The fact that liberation theologians tend to be almost naively religious, sometimes even biblicist (Bosch 1991:439), is the basic proof of the possibility to the use of Marxist social analysis from a strong faith perspective. It also has to be realized that not all liberation theologians are making use of this method anyway. Segundo (in Kritzinger 1991:298) speaks of two different theologies of liberation. One originated in a university setting, where students and lecturers adopted neo-Marxist methods. The other has a strong orientation towards Basic Christian Communities. Therefore it has a much closer touch to the life world of the poor themselves. Some consequences are a greater sensitivity to popular culture and religions, which are important motivating forces in the life of the poor. In the process Latin American liberation theologians have also given attention to the dangers of a onesided use of the analytical method of Marx, which were pointed out to them by other liberation theologians in the Third World.

Mission in South Africa comes closer to the practice of a more wholistic missiological approach than the practice in probably most other countries especially in the Western world. At least Christians of both, evangelistic or political (liberationist) interest demonstrate an attitude of unity by working together focusing on the respective human need. The full spectrum of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs seems to be in full view. It is this openmindedness of many Christians there, this willingness to



listen to the other with the different opinion, this "unity by attitude", which has made the polarisation between ecumenicals and evangelicals meaningless. Where Christians of evangelistic and socio-political orientation in many Western countries would polarize, fight with each other and drift apart, they seem to unify and focus their efforts on the respective need together in South Africa. And this trend is not limited to South Africa, in spite of the growing rift between ecumenicals and evangelicals (Sundermeier 1990:259). Saayman (1990:107-108) states it as a matter of fact that Christians from the Third World have made the gap meaningless in their common struggle for a life of freedom and dignity. In South Africa both "liberationists" and "evangelicals" expressed their serious Christian criticism of the present government. Their concept of a free and democratic South Africa they compiled in the documents "Kairos" and "Evangelical Witness". That liberationists and evangelicals work together closely is demonstrated by the fact (a) that leading Christians such as Frank Chikane, Caesar Molebatsi and Zwo Nevhatulu had no problems in signing both documents, and (b) that liberationists and evangelicals conduct as a joint venture the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT), as individuals and also as organisations. Then there is the case of ecumenical church leaders such as Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naude who by no means could be called "unevangelical".

Saayman observes that for various reasons the ecumenical/evangelical polarization is fast becoming highly irrelevant in the Third World, and that is where the majority of Christians live. But this does not mean that the days of

polarisation are over. In place of the ecumenical/evangelical controversy with its roots in the Western Protestant missionary movement and their typically Western, especially American preoccupations, Saayman sees the new polarization to develop between a "liberationist" and an "evangelistic" group. The preoccupation of the liberationist group will be the social, political and economical. But this will be done from a strong spiritual and biblical base. The concern of the evangelistic group on the other hand will be the themes of conversion and salvation. This will not develop to the total exclusion of the socio-political aspects, but rather in a somewhat radical evangelical mould.

Prof. Saayman expects the common involvement in the serious problems facing the Third World to be characterized by a high degree of co-operation and fellowship, unless the differences in approach are artificially reinforced by Western missionaries. There is a great probability that the gulf between these two groups will not become as deep as the gulf between ecumenicals and evangelicals has become. Instead there are great chances for the fellowship of the Christian community to be maintained, and a service of a united witness for the cause of full freedom and humanisation to be experienced.

As far as the South African context is concerned, it is the fact that liberation theologians by and large do not subscribe to Marxist ideology (as opposed to social analysis) which really helps to make it possible for evangelical Christians to work closely together with them. Furthermore, liberation theology

apparently has become even a matter of church growth. Saayman (cf in Shenk 1983:132 ff) points to the fact that in Afrikaner churches Apartheid was theologically explained as God's will. For that reason especially young people are now leaving the churches in masses. Their argument goes: How come that Apartheid had all the years supposedly been God's will and suddenly he changes his mind (1)? It appears that somehow liberation theology in South Africa seems to be evangelistically permeated, at least having a considerable evangelistic value because it seems to make the Christian faith credible. The question can be added if not all dimensions of mission as entry points for the kingdom of God are in themselves intrinsically evangelistical, as long as they do exactly that - making the Christian faith credible. Liberationists and evangelicals might not consciously share a common general missiological approach as suggested in this study. However, their focusing together on the respective contextual human needs appears to come extremely close to such a model. For them to succeed in giving full birth to a shared missiological approach in which the special emphasis, liberation, evangelism, church growth, etc. consciously become dimensions of such an approach, it depends much on the question of how realistic the possibilities are for the theologians there to develop such a concept. For outside observers it is difficult to determine, whether the already demonstrated practical co-operation there can also lead to an attempt in theological work to arrive at common convergent thinking.

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION OF CRITICISMS OF CHURCH GROWTH THEORY AS STATED BY ECUMENICAL VOICES

### 4.1 WHY THIS DISCUSSION?

#### 4.1.1 THE IMPORTANCE TO CONSIDER ALL ARGUMENTS

The goal of this study, the attempt of suggesting a version for a possible wholistic missiological approach, where evangelism and church growth have as much a place as socio-political activity, is clear. Here it is not enough to know of the suspicions ecumenicals and evangelicals have towards each other, and to be informed of the reasons for polarization and separation. Rather the arguments, the stated criticisms have to be taken very seriously. Then it can be evaluated where common theological ground exists, or where there is room to work towards it. If such a discussion is not undertaken, the missiological approach envisioned seems to be impossible.

#### 4.1.2 THE CLIMATE OF THE DEBATE

Before the individual criticisms of church growth theory as stated by respected ecumenical voices are evaluated and discussed in detail, a few words on the climate of the debate are in place. One of the surprises the reader of missiological literature often experiences is the fact that the atmosphere in the discussion on church growth appears to be partly poisoned by polemical argumentation. Informed observers like the Dutch missiologist Prof. Verkuyl call those argumentations "biting". Both, some noted church growth protagonists as well as antagonists are noted for this style. While Verkuyl tries to be fair in his own evaluation

of church growth theory (1978:191), he lists some own criticisms. Then he mentions those who have been "more biting in their criticism", and he refers to the Rev. Matthew P. John from India as a specific example. John attributes McGavran's emphasis on growth to him having become too wrapped up in the mentality of American business. There, he goes on, one finds that sums, profit, numerical growth and success play large roles, which he sees mirrored in church growth thinking.

Verkuyl (1978:68) uses this word "biting" on McGavran as well. McGavran's writing just prior to the Uppsala assembly of the World Council of Churches, "Will Uppsala Betray the Two Billion?", he calls a "biting article". He adds that it had both a negative and positive effect on some of the members, especially on those responsible for writing the report "Renewal in Mission."

The fact that McGavran had written this article prior to the Uppsala assembly appears to be polemical in itself. The question arises if not this has set the stage for the continued polemical discussion (1). Prof. Bosch (1988:14f) calls attention to a statement by McGavran to demonstrate how clear and how absolute the lines were drawn that year (1968):

"They (the WCC) do not believe that it makes an eternal difference whether men accept the Lord Jesus and are baptized in His name. They do not believe that in the Bible we have the authoritative, infallible Word of God. They cannot but oppose church growth strategy; their theology

allows them to take neither the Church nor the salvation of men's souls seriously" (McGavran 1968:339).

Bosch argued that through this statement and through McGavran's famous article from the same year, "Will Uppsala Betray the Two Billion" (1968) referred to above, the die was cast. Bosch saw no point in trying twenty years after the event to apportion guilt for this break between the WCC and the church growth movement. Instead, he encouraged the attempt to escape from this deadlock.

Bosch then continued to plead for more tolerance, especially if the other does not see the things the way I see them. He admonished to accept the priorities of the other to be as valid as the own priorities, and to see - in this case the work of the WCC in the 1960s and early 1970s as genuine attempts to grapple with real issues, even if one does not necessarily agree with the answers given then.

Bosch's latter statement went clearly to the address of church growth protagonists, particularly at Fuller Theological Seminary, given as part of a speech to the faculty of this seminary's socalled School of World Mission. His suggestion to try to escape the deadlock of the break between WCC and the church growth movement will be taken up in this study by dealing with individual aspects of the criticisms stated by ecumenicals, which have contributed to this break.

## 4.2 UNDERSTANDING OF MISSION AND EVANGELISM

### 4.2.1 THE CRITICISM STATED

One of the most frequent and most severe criticisms the church growth movement has received relates to the understanding of mission and evangelism by some of its protagonists (2). While McGavran stands for the equation of mission with evangelism (3), it has to be realized that this is not typical for adherents of church growth missiology. To quote McGavran, "Theologically mission was evangelism by every means possible" (in Bosch 1991:410) and Johnston, "Historically the mission of the church is evangelism alone" (in Bosch 1991:410). The position which favors a priority of evangelism within the total task of mission but considers other tasks as important and valid is much more frequent. The prominent ecumenical voice, Prof. Verkuyl (1978:192), articulated this criticism very clearly. According to him, McGavran's method of setting priorities is simply one-sided and unbiblical because his top priority is always growth. Verkuyl contrasts this to the New Testament, where the priorities vary according to the situation. He mentions as example hunger, sickness, the struggle for justice, or the proclamation of the gospel. Each for itself receives top priority according to the varying dominant need. The conclusion Verkuyl draws is that mission strategy must always remain flexible. This will happen if it remains alert to the hints God provides along the way (cf Luke 10).

Bosch (1988:17) in his criticism of the "priority of evangelism" within mission, which he presented to the faculty of the School of

World Mission of Fuller Theological Seminary, first makes it clear that he understands, even appreciates a certain concern for "prioritising". But then he points out that he thinks it is a baleful undertaking because "it inevitably polarises people and, at least by implication, declares those who do not hold it as sub-Christian." Moreover, it is something of recent origin, not older than the latter part of the 19th century. To argue in terms of priority is not something to be found with the earlier Christians. It is interesting indeed to see how parallel Bosch's argument runs to Verkuyl's. Bosch states it to be quite natural for everything the church is involved in to be intimately related to evangelism. Then he asks, "But does this always and everywhere mean verbal proclamation as a first priority?", and goes on answering this rhetoric question by pointing to a church witnessing against injustice and perhaps suffering for this, to be at least implicitly and at the same time incarnationally involved in evangelism. As specific cases, he uses the example of Billy Graham and Martin Luther King, whom Bosch referred to as "two great men of God, both Baptists", the American south produced during the 1950s and 1960s. He then asks, if only Graham was an evangelist, and suggests that King also was in a profound way evangelising by calling people to faith, to a commitment, to solidarity with the Kingdom of God and its cause.

#### 4.2.2 COMMENTING ON THE CRITICISM

The equation of mission with verbal evangelism, or mission reduced of its social and cultural mandate is an extreme viewpoint which a few missiologists inside and outside of the church growth movement hold, Protestants and Roman Catholics alike (cf Bosch 1992:16-65).



That church growth protagonists like Arthur Glasser, the former dean of Fuller Seminary's School of World Mission and Church Growth are known for their position on the importance of the evangelistic as well as social and cultural mandates of the Christian church (cf Castro 1985:22) (4) identifies them with a more wholistic understanding of mission.

One thing stands out as a minimum factor for any type of church growth missiology: the proclamation part of evangelism as conscious attempt to lead people from unbelief to faith in Christ will always be a very important aspect of mission. That especially evangelicals have argued so sharply in favor of a "priority of evangelism" should be seen against the background of and a reaction to the understanding of mission as humanization reduced of its evangelistic dimension since the Cosmic Christ debate started in New Delhi 1961. The Cosmic Christ concept with its implications for a broad scope of salvation cannot be overestimated for an integrating understanding of mission. It certainly is important for church growth as part of a larger missiology as well. The heyday of the priority of evangelism debate was not only characterized by a lack of the Cosmic Christ concept amongst evangelicals in general, but also with a Cosmic Christ concept reduced of the evangelization dimension, as the evangelicals understood it. Large segments of the evangelical community still have the reputation of not having a grasp of this Cosmic Christ concept. The priority of evangelism debate was thus preprogrammed, the stage was set for a conflict.

Saayman (1984:25) points to the great emphasis the old distinction between "salvation history" and "secular history" as history of

the world, the arena where God is primarily at work, had received. The church awakened to the realization that the world has been the locus of God's activity all the time. Therefore it has in fact already been united under its cosmic king (*kosmokrator*) Christ, as Saayman describes it. Therefore his dominion must become visible in the arena of the world through the focal points for the church in carrying out its mission. These have to be social and political activity. Since that is where God is already at work in his mission (*Missio Dei!*), it is the missionary responsibility of the church to determine where God is at work in order to join him in his mission (also cf Kramm 1979: 72-88).

If mission is said to have as focal point social and political activity, a reaction should be expected highlighting the need for evangelism. Also, if evangelism is said to be the exclusive focal point of mission, a reaction should be expected the same way underlining the need for social and political activity.

Bosch in his argument against the inherent priority of evangelism asks the rhetorical questions, "But does this always and everywhere mean verbal proclamation as a first priority? Is not a church that witnesses against injustice and perhaps suffers for this, at least implicitly (...) involved in evangelism?"

It is interesting to note that Stott, who as a spokesperson for the Lausanne Covenant as well as a voice heard by many within the WCC, uses the very same argument Bosch develops against the priority of evangelism as an argument to defend it. The far-reaching implications of his statement to reveal a

misunderstanding of each other in this discussion should be obvious.

"This does not mean that words and works, evangelism and social action, are such inseparable partners that all of us must engage in both all the time. Situations vary, and so do Christian callings. As for situations, there will be times when a person's eternal destiny is the most urgent consideration, for we must not forget that men without Christ are perishing. But there will certainly be other times when a person's material need is so pressing that he would not be able to hear the gospel if we shared it with him. The man who fell among robbers needed above all else at that moment oil and bandages for his wounds, not evangelistic tracts in his pockets! Similarly, in the words of a missionary in Nairobi quoted by Bishop John Taylor, >a hungry man has no ears< (p.37). If our enemy is hungry, our biblical mandate is not to evangelize him but to feed him (Romans 12.20)! Then too there is a diversity of Christian callings, and every Christian should be faithful to his own calling. The doctor must not neglect the practice of medicine for evangelism, nor should the evangelist be distracted from the ministry of the word by the ministry of tables, as the apostles quickly discovered (Acts 6)" (Stott 1975:28).

Now Stott does not stand as a representative for the church growth movement but rather as a respected spokesperson of the Lausanne movement. But he is a good example of the implications of his use

of "priority of evangelism". It is obvious that for him it does not mean verbal evangelism at all times. In fact, it does remind one very much of Saayman's definition of mission with its different central dimensions varying according to the context. His theory appears to be very much identical to Castro's (5) use of the concept of different "entry points" to the kingdom of God in the mission of the church. While Stott insists on the priority of evangelism, he argues with force that (in the words of Samuel and Sugden) "the road to Jericho sets its own agenda" (6).

The question arises if we do not have a *semantic* problem in this priority debate. While critics like Bosch apparently understand under this (unfortunate) term "priority of evangelism" to mean verbal proclamation at all times, those like Stott who do use it obviously mean something else - in light of the above mentioned example. In all probability they rather mean something along the lines of "a corrective presence of evangelism" within the mission of the church.

If leading ecumenicals and evangelicals have such a developed common understanding of diverse entry points for the kingdom of God as central dimensions of mission, then Saayman's definition of mission should be a possible working definition for both, ecumenicals and evangelicals, although many evangelicals would have a problem of how Saayman treats the "priority question". It could thus serve as a bridge between typical ecumenical and evangelical understandings of mission, especially since Saayman highlights the need for the evangelization dimension as part of mission in order to distinguish the church from a social club (7).

The term "priority of evangelism" with Stott would read with Bosch (1991:10), "Mission includes evangelism as one of its essential dimensions." Realizing that Bosch, as shown above, argues against a priority of evangelism at the same time, it is interesting to note that Saayman sees with Bosch's mission definition the inherent priority of evangelism still incorporated (7). It should be apparent that the positions on evangelism of Stott, Bosch and Saayman are not very far from each other. Could it not be that many of those arguing for the priority of evangelism, as unfortunate as the term is, simply mean to say: *Evangelism must be there*? Could it not be that they mean what Gensichen (1971:27) expresses with the words, "In jedem Fall scheint festzustehen, daß die nicht-evangelisierte Welt zu ihrem Heil der Ansage der Rettung bedarf, ..."? If one sees this statement in light of Gensichen's definition of dimension and intention of mission, it appears that Gensichen holds a kerygmatic paradigm of mission, which is not unfamiliar to an evangelical understanding of mission voiced by representatives of the Lausanne movement. This raises the question if the priority of evangelism statement of the Lausanne Covenant is not simply an appeal to flesh out the importance of a kerygmatic model of mission to make sure that in the future mission would not be void of the evangelization dimension. Gensichen seemed to have the same concern as the signatories of the Lausanne Covenant and many church growth missiologists. This seems to indicate that the concern for an ensured presence of a clear proclamation of the gospel within the mission of the church has been held by theologians much beyond the evangelical movement. It is the example of Gensichen (1971:204), which strongly points in that direction. He saw the danger of a mission which was

exclusively engaged in social-diaconal and revolutionary aspects of primarily physical and material dimensions. This Gensichen called a confusion of welfare with salvation and a fundamental reorientation from God to the human being. This has to be responded to with loud opposition. Gensichen saw this development as a challenge for a church which has become insecure, to remember and focus again on the central calling of proclamation (8).

However, many evangelicals have disassociated themselves from the term "priority". They see how many misunderstandings this term evokes. But more than that, they do not see that a concern for a clear presentation and proclamation of the gospel necessitates such a term. For the first time in a global conference associated with the World Evangelical Fellowship this stranglehold of the primary-secondary type of thinking was broken at the Consultation "The Church in Response to Human Need" in Wheaton in 1983.

Paragraph 26 declared:

"Our time together enabled us to see that poverty is not a necessary evil but often the result of social, economic, political, and religious systems marked by injustice, exploitation, and oppression. ... Evil is not only in the human heart but also in social structures. Because God is just and merciful, hating evil and loving righteousness, there is an urgent need for Christians in the present circumstances to commit ourselves to acting in mercy and seeking justice. The mission of the church includes both the proclamation of the Gospel and its demonstration. We must therefore evangelize, respond to immediate human needs, and

press for social transformation. The means we use, however, must be consistent with the end we desire" (in Samuel and Sugden 1987:260).

The question Bosch suggests in arguing against a constant priority of verbal evangelism ("Is not a church that witnesses against injustice and perhaps suffers for this, at least implicitly ... involved in evangelism?") expands the whole evangelism concept. In the example he uses he compares Martin Luther King to Billy Graham and suggests that King has to be considered as an evangelist as well. This position is only to be affirmed. It suggests a further question: Is not everything representing credible Christianity, everything done out of love intrinsically evangelistic?

The intrinsic evangelistic dimension in all of his mission is to be seen in Jesus' own ministry. The gospel was not only verbally proclaimed by Jesus, but was transparent to all his works. Legrand (1990:65) lists as examples for this his miracles, exorcisms, symbolic deeds, the attitude he adopted toward the lowly, the way he mixed with sinners and tax collectors, the company in which he took his meals. In all of these situations Jesus transmitted, in terms of concrete life, the good news of a reign of God accessible to the poor. Legrand refers to Jesus' "freedom from legalistic taboos and social pressures, the poverty of his lifestyle, his fearlessness in the face of the mighty of this world, the authority with which his words rang and his deeds shone", as proclaimers of the message of freedom and of victory. All negative powers in the social, economic, political, and cosmic dimensions

were confronted and overcome. But more than by what Jesus did and said, he communicated the good news by what he was. It was exactly as John says (John 1:14), before saying the words of God, Jesus was the very Word of God.

In other words: The evangelization dimension (in its sense of communication) is somehow penetrating all other mission dimensions, even if not intended to always do so. One is reminded of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matth.5:16); and "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father" (John 10:37, 38). Jesus lived out his own definition of mission by his practical "apologetics" of word and deed complementing each other. Both, word and deed had a communicative value with the goal of leading to faith in the Father and the Son. The words interpreted his deeds, and his deeds embodied his words. It reminds of Scherer's (in Bosch 1991:VIII) definition of mission in the preface to the famous (missiological) series (ASM) he edits: "By >mission< in this context is meant a passage over the boundary between faith in Jesus Christ and its absence". This does not degrade social service to a means of evangelism, neither does it make it a subdivision of evangelism. But one thing stands out very clear: Often deeds speak much louder than words.



#### 4.2.3 CONCLUSION

While it remains true that certain church growth protagonists stand for a reductionist understanding of mission in the sense of "mission equals evangelism", and others stand for a one-sided and unbiblical thinking on prioritising, this is certainly not true for all church growth missiologists. Neither is this necessary for church growth theory. While some use the misunderstandable term "priority" of evangelism, they (like Stott) seem to stand for a (corrective) presence of evangelism within mission, while still others have abandoned the thinking in primary-secondary patterns completely (Wheaton 83). One thing will remain a fact for a great percentage of church growth thinkers: a concern for a kerygmatic intention within the mission dimension. It can be expected that it won't necessitate the adherence to a purely kerygmatic model of mission in the future. Bosch is an outstanding example of a missiologist who has challenged and enriched the thinking on the intrinsic evangelistic quality of all mission dimensions other than verbal proclamation. Emilio Castro is an example for creatively linking evangelism and church growth with the calling of the church to responsibility in society, and therefore to other missiological approaches, in the specific case he mentioned, to an applied liberation theology (as spelled out in Chapter 1). He has done nothing less but built an important bridge between what has started to be considered evangelical and ecumenical missiology. While it can be expected that there won't ever be a church growth missiology without a prominent place for the evangelization dimension, the ground is broken not only for evangelism, but particularly for church growth as well to be considered in relationship to other paradigms of mission.

### 4.3 THE SCOPE OF SALVATION

#### 4.3.1 THE CRITICISM STATED

Soteriology is often seen as the existential root of all genuine theology (Nürnberg 1992:206). This could be transferred to most religions, as often their concern is to obtain salvation from divine beings, in terms of the meaning of life, temporal and eternal wellbeing, etc. It would go beyond the scope of this study to prove the centrality of soteriological thought in other theological disciplines. The theme of "justification by faith" in Protestant theology alone provides masses of a material to demonstrate how much systematic theology stands in direct relationship to the issue of salvation. And if it is the case that soteriology is the central determinative factor of theology, it will be no overstatement to say that soteriology determines missiology. Here again, the theme of salvation in missiological literature and in missiological world conferences indicates that the church perceives her task to help transmit God's salvation to humankind. The spectrum of missiology and mission stands in direct relationship to the soteriology of the missiologist and missionary. And here we have a very foundational criticism against church growth missiology, that is the accusation of a narrow scope of salvation. This criticism is quite foundational to the other criticisms against church growth. It is treated only as point number two in this study because of the light the "priority of evangelism" discussion sheds on possible semantic problems and aspects of the debate, as these are easily overlooked, although they have a real bearing on this point as well.

Now the criticism stated with the words of Verkuyl (1978:192):

"McGavran tends to divide human existence into two parts, the >spiritual< on the one side and the >social, political, economic, etc.< on the other. He claims that concern with what he calls >temporal projects< only serves to deflect one's attention from the more important issues of eternal redemption and the soul's salvation. But where in either the Old Testament or the New does one find warrant for such a fissure between soul and body, between eternal and temporal?"

Bosch points out in explaining the kerygmatic model of mission that apart from the Liberation model and, to a lesser, extent, the African Indigenous model, traditionally the major aim of mission has not only been salvation, but that this was primarily understood as salvation of the eternal soul. This was determined by ancient Greek Platonic thinking to a great extent, in which a sharp distinction was made between body and soul, the temporal and the eternal, this world and the next, the profane and the sacred.

Numerous examples for this can be given from diverse church growth authors. Two direct quotes from McGavran shall suffice to substantiate the truth of Verkuyl's observation.

"The Church today faces deep cleavage among her members at just this point. Some are so deeply impressed by the physical needs of man - and who can deny their urgency? - that meeting these needs become for them the highest present purpose of God and the Church.

... Deeply as I sympathize with the problem and long as I have ministered to desperate physical needs - for years I superintended a leprosy home - I cannot ally myself on this point with those who put social action first. On the contrary, my conviction is that the salvation granted to those who believe on Jesus Christ is still the supreme need of man, and all other human good flows from that prior reconciliation to God" (McGavran 1980:43).

"Salvation is a vertical relationship ... which issues in horizontal relationships ... The vertical must not be displaced by the horizontal. Desirable as social ameliorations are, working for them must not be substituted for the biblical requirements of/for >salvation<" (in Bosch 1991:399).

John Stott (1975:82-108) exemplifies this position which reserves the term "salvation" for the spiritual aspect of human beings exclusively. He excludes from salvation all aspects other than the vertical relationship to God. This is a position large segments of the evangelical movement hold, and it helps to understand the polarization between ecumenicals and evangelicals a little better. It is best seen in the way he interprets New Testament occurrences of the word salvation, which denotes physical deliverance (1975:87). He emphasizes that all these references cannot be used to reconstruct the biblical doctrine of salvation. For Stott (1975:87), salvation by faith in Christ is moral not material, and a rescue from sin not from harm. In interpreting Jesus' words "your faith has saved you", which was used for both, rescue from

sin and harm, Stott distinguishes between "salvation" (dealing with sin) and "intentional signs of salvation" (deliverance from harm, physical rescue from disease, drowning and death).

Stott further states that the early church understood it this way. How he came to this understanding of Jesus' saving works, to which Jesus attached salvific terminology himself, as "intentional signs of his salvation" only, remains unclear. Many evangelicals as much as ecumenicals would have exegetical difficulties with what appears to be an artificial separation of "actual salvation" and "intentional signs of salvation". His line of argument is not very convincing. If God's salvation manifests itself in meeting all areas of a person's needs, this certainly does not logically necessitate the meaning of "a kind of comprehensive insurance against physical ills of every kind, including disease, drowning and even death", as Stott stated it would do if connected with salvific terminology. Neither would it mean that healing would be readily and instantly available. But why cannot God's blessings manifesting themselves in a better wholeness of a person simply be seen as God's salvation itself, as scripture states it? Why does it have to be separated and called "intentional signs of salvation"? The sharp distinction between the soul and the body, between the eternal and the temporal seems to be reflected in Stott's view.

#### 4.3.2 COMMENTING ON THE CRITICISM

The validity of the criticism against some church growth authors and representatives of the kerygmatic model of mission who hold a somewhat narrow concept of salvation does not need to be worked

out further. But it cannot be overstated that Stott's hermeneutical approach to the understanding of salvation in the gospels is by no means necessary for a church growth missiology. Its dominance in parts of the relevant literature should not lead to a premature dismissal of church growth as incompatible to other soteriological approaches. Since it is a main aim of this study to inspire the development of integrating, wholistic missiologies, the concentration of thought shall redirect focus to new models.

Everything seems to hang on the "compatibility question" now. Is church growth missiology indeed compatible with other missiological approaches including those from the broad variety of the ecumenical spectrum? The best way this can be demonstrated is to try to locate the overlap in the salvation concept of respected ecumenical and evangelical missiologists.

Verkuyl (1978:197-198) describes the kingdom to which the Bible testifies to involve both a proclamation and a realization of a total salvation. This covers the whole range of human needs - one is reminded of Maslow's hierarchy. This salvation is manifested in destroying every pocket of evil and grief affecting humankind. It becomes obvious that for Verkuyl the manifestation of the kingdom and of salvation will be identical for the observer. This is logical, if the kingdom as the rule of God is considered as the root, then the manifestation of salvation will be the fruit. In an attempt to interpret Verkuyl it might be possible to say: Whatever the kingdom "touches", will be "touched" by salvation, in a varying degree according to the situation and the receptivity of the one being blessed. Verkuyl goes on to describe God's kingdom

in the New Testament as having a breadth and scope which is unsurpassed. It embraces heaven as well as earth, world history as well as the whole cosmos. It is then logical to conclude, God's salvation has this same breadth and scope, and can be perceived only in cosmic dimensions. The new order of affairs the kingdom has begun in Christ, will when completed by him, bring about a full reconciliation with God, but a full restoration between genders, generations, races, and even between humans and nature as well. New Testament salvation means nothing less than that.

It is clear that Verkuyl's scope of salvation includes the spiritual, psychological, physical, social, cultural, political, economic and ecological dimensions. His reference to God's kingdom to embrace heaven as well as earth, world history as well as the whole cosmos suggests the idea of the "Cosmic Christ".

Foundational to the establishment of a salvation concept is the question: How broad is salvation in scripture (cf Nicholls 1985:85-108)? It depends on the hermeneutical key, the exegetical approach being used if a common ground between ecumenicals and evangelicals can be established. How much common ground exists already is difficult to say. Hopefully a comparison will lead to a lot of positive surprises. This study cannot prove this empirically. But leading theologians of the ecumenical and the evangelical camps have no problem to see God's saving action as embodied in the coming of Christ and in his death on the cross (cf Sundermeier 1990:260). Christ's work of redemption on Calvary is seen as counteracting the disobedience of the human by his obedience, bringing a full redemption from sin and its evil consequences to the whole cosmos. The invasion of the cosmos by

the kingdom of God has become possible. The tension of the present time is marked by the already/not yet dimension of God's kingdom (cf Ladd 1987:24-51).

The reason for the exegetical weakness on salvation of some might have to do with a confusion of the concepts of "reconciliation" and "redemption" (cf Sundermeier 1990:268-269). The concept of redemption denotes the setting free of slaves, i.e. it has its Sitz im Leben in slave law. The reconciliation concept, on the other hand, has the priestly sacrificial service as well as the judicial system of ancient Israel as its sources. Reconciliation deals with broken relationships with God and with other people. It was only when Christians became influenced by Gnosticism, that the two concepts were used interchangeably and therefore alienated from the biblical understanding of redemption. If mission theology discovers that these concepts are neither interchangeable nor intrinsically separable, but that instead they belong together, it brings full weight to bear on all areas of life in need of God's salvific work. And it brings full justice to the diverse concerns of both ecumenicals and evangelicals regarding salvation as well. If ecumenicals tend to be concerned to recapture the horizontal dimensions of salvation, evangelicals tend to try to recapture the vertical dimension. The solution almost suggests itself to attempt to develop a full view with both concepts. It also varies according to the context whether the horizontal or the vertical dimension of salvation needs to be recaptured.

Certainly this understanding needs to regain its original place in the life of the church. This will do away with all "priority



debates" regarding the mission of the church, and the church will be able to say with the words of Sundermeier (1990:169):

"What determines the choice either for liberation or for reconciliation is the difference of the situation in which the word is to be spoken. The slave must be set free, as must the impoverished and the dispossessed, but the belligerent and the evildoer must be reconciled to God and neighbour."

And this is exactly the goal of a wholistic missiological approach. It is determined by the soteriological fact, the premise the missionary works from and builds on: Christ's work on Calvary is thus seen as redeeming the whole cosmos, to allow for salvation to be brought to all areas of life affected by the fall. Here Nürnberger can only be considered right in his view that the goal of salvation is comprehensive wellbeing in peace with God, who is the source and criterion of the whole of reality. The acts of salvation are divine responses to experienced deficiencies in human wellbeing, covering the whole range of human needs. It is very interesting that Nürnberger has related the concept of salvation to Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs. The biblical concept of salvation follows the three levels of needs Maslow defines, material, social and spiritual, from the basis upwards. Nürnberger suggests that contrary to popular misunderstanding each higher level does not leave the previous lower level behind but incorporates it. This means, social justice does not obviate physical survival but rather serves it. The experience of personal

authenticity or self-realization does not obviate social justice but serves it. And now Nürnberger comes up with a key sentence: "In other words, experienced need defines expected salvation."

He raises the crucial question whether the perception of experienced need is really identical with genuine need, and if expected salvation equals genuine salvation. This he negates as human perceptions are fallible. Therefore the concept of comprehensive wellbeing, the perception of specific needs as well as the expectation of salvation may all themselves be deficient. But he does not stop there. He shows the other side of the coin. And that is that the experience of genuine salvation may retrospectively define real need. The point Nürnberger tries to establish is that a salvation which is unrelated to human need, is an empty concept, and therefore irrelevant. He compares it with trying to save a drowning person who is not drowning.

This broad scope of salvation is quite consistent in ecumenical missiological literature. Castro (1985:114) quotes Boff and Chethimattam where they state that the eschatological kingdom of Christ embraces and embodies the totality of creation. The whole of humankind is embodied in the spiritual, historical and socio-economic dimensions. It is very interesting that Boff and Chethimattam see the final form of salvation to include not only the dimensions of the survival of the spirit and of the immortality of the soul, but also the resurrection of the whole human being, including the resurrection of the body. It is this physical dimension of the final realization of salvation, the redemption of the body, which they see as implying the redemption

of the whole social, economic and political relationship of human's earthly life as well (9).

It is this inclusive understanding of salvation which makes a wholistic missiological approach not only possible, but which makes it the necessary consequence of it.

Note the way Castro continues this thought projecting liberation, evangelization and development all as parts of one and the same mission:

"In fact, the work for the liberation of peoples and for their development is the most effective witness of the gospel which is founded in the universal and unconditional love of God for men. Seen in this perspective, evangelization and development penetrate each other in a single movement for human progress and salvation embracing every man and the whole mankind. Hence the work for human development is not extraneous to evangelization but pertains to the gospel core" (in Castro 1985:114).

Radical evangelicals like Sider and Parker (in Nicholls 1985:86-87) define salvation broader than Stott, but in contrast to Castro limit it exclusively to the people within the redeemed community. Those who enter the new community by confessing Christ, experience salvation by the transformation of all their relationships, God, brothers and sisters, and even economic relationships. But here they draw the borderline in saying that salvation does not include socio-economic changes in secular society. In their own words,

"...salvation pertains to both personal and social, both vertical and horizontal relationships but only within the community of believers who personally confess Jesus Christ." While in their article Sider and Parker do not define "redeemed community" and how to enter it, it should be noted that their speech was given at the evangelical Grand Rapids 1982 world conference. This suggests the predominant evangelical understanding of entering a relationship with Christ by a crisis experience, conversion, and the "redeemed community", the church as body of Christ which was spiritually joined.

This, of course, is a very different reading from what the Bangkok documents express: Salvation is the peace of the people in Vietnam, independence in Angola and justice and reconciliation in Northern Ireland (cf Castro 1985:20). Seen from the perspective of the above described soteriological background, such a statement could only be potentially true - and then it would be a broader understanding of salvation than that suggested by Sider and Parker already. The weakness of the Bangkok statement lies in the fact that not all apparent blessings for humanity turn out to be such on the long run. If we think of Adolf Hitler's political measures to create jobs, how he got about five million people employed by building streets, etc., it becomes clear that this was only a blessing for a certain moment in time. The German highways later turned out to be better streets for tanks to go to war. Not to mention the tremendous confidence in Adolf Hitler growing in big parts of the German population at first, and the disaster which followed afterwards. If the blessing on the long run turns out to

be a blessing from the Creator and Redeemer God indeed, this will often also only be observable on the long run (10).

The fact that in almost one out of four occurrences of the word salvation in the gospels it refers to deliverances from physical distress (cf Nicholls 1985:93) invites a broader understanding of salvation than Sider and Parker hold. For it does not secure the possibility for any human being to decide in the last consequence what a salvific work of God is and what it is not. It also allows for a clear distinction between eternal salvation and temporal salvation. For example, many German Christians prayed for the coming down of the wall. They *claimed* the unification of Germany in 1989 and before - praying in the name of Jesus Christ for the salvation, the redemption and reconciliation he had brought about on the cross, to be manifested against what many experienced as evil structures of a communist society. This reveals a political manifestation of salvation in the thinking of many (evangelical) Christians, even if they would not always be able to describe it with this terminology. But if, what they prayed for, could not be considered salvation, then according to their soteriology, they should not have had any business in praying for it the way they did.

It is worthwhile to sum up this line of thought with a statement by Anderson (in Castro 1985:20):

"There are historical priorities according to which salvation is anticipated in one dimension first, be it the personal, the political, or the economic dimensions. This

point of entry differs from situation to situation in which we work and suffer. We should know that such anticipations, such entry points, are not the whole of salvation, and we must keep in mind the other dimensions while we work.

Forgetting this denies the wholeness of salvation. Nobody can do in any particular situation everything at the same time. There are various gifts and tasks, but there is one Spirit and one goal."

In a search for promising demonstrations of a wholistic soteriological and missiological thinking, Black African leaders appear as shining examples. Saayman (1991:68) points out in his introduction to three black pioneers, Ntsikana (C.1780-C.1821), Tiyo Soga (1829-1871), and Nehemiah Tile (died 1891), "that they did not regard their socio-political involvement as some sort of unnecessary adjunct, but as an essential dimension of their Christian existence." That all three gave high priority to evangelistic preaching and teaching did not exclude their use of the pulpit as an important tool in political conscientisation (11). Their broad scope of salvation developed very naturally, perhaps intuitively and in all probability can be ascribed to the fact that their personal backgrounds lacked the influence of Platonic dualistic thinking.

Modern examples of a concern for evangelism, church growth and church planting converging with all other aspects of salvation as the physical, psychological, social, economic, political and ecological dimensions are today's African Independent Churches (cf Daneel 1992:192-243). The Independents view the Holy Spirit as

liberator from poverty and economic despair, inspiring socio-economic progress, and as one intimately involved in nation building. Their broadened pneumatology appears to be a direct result of their cosmic understanding of salvation: The Holy Spirit's function encompasses everything relating to human well-being and the improvement of the quality of this life in terms of spiritual, cultural and socio-economic progress. It needs to be added that this strong focus on this-worldly salvation does not exclude faith in a heavenly eternity beyond this existence (cf Daneel 1993:159). Their tendency is to see the Holy Spirit as saviour, healer and liberator, moving away from a predominantly personalized and exploitive soteriology towards a more universal, cosmic and altruistic approach to promote justice, peace and salvation for all of creation (Daneel:160). Obviously they are not far from western theologies of the environment and of ecological liberation (Moltmann, Carmody, Granberg-Michaelson). Of the many practical activities of tree planting, wild life conservation, etc. the celebration of eucharist exemplifies the Independents scope of salvation best: While all types of sins are confessed, ecological sins are included before partaking in the eucharist. Then, as part of the eucharist ceremony, a new tree is planted by the participant (cf Daneel 1993:164-165).

These African models stand in pleasant contrast to the way salvation, and therefore the task of mission, is understood here. The way the German Protestant Church (EKD), as mentioned in the first chapter, is perceived to work with three basically different types of approaches: the conversion oriented approaches exemplified in a German church growth model, the fellowship

oriented approaches with an emphasis on diaconal and political responsibility and the situational approaches (cf EKD 1986: 62-72) (12). Here we see the obvious impossibility to converge evangelistic with political responsibility within the broad scope of salvation (13). And where such a convergence is indeed existing, it is neither perceived nor acknowledged. It is also surprising how rigorous both first models are frequently discredited in favor of the situational approach model of the Volkskirche. Too often the respect for church growth protagonists and for theologians with a political orientation somewhat identifying with a basic grassroots community model, is undermined within the EKD. Welker (1987:79-81) does a service to the church in pointing out how irresponsible and counterproductive such a categorical criticism is.

#### 4.3.3 Conclusion

Very often nothing is more convincing than a model that demonstrates that a certain theory does in fact work out in practice. Black African leaders, especially from the African Independent Churches, have acted out such a model on a big scale. Their broad scope of salvation appears to have much similarity with the ecumenical Cosmic Christ concept, although they tend to have more of a pneumatological than a christological emphasis. It allows for both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions to be blended together and makes room for a concern for church growth and the plantatio ecclesiae scheme. Their mission concept and activities have the potential to serve as a model for an integrating wholistic missiological approach. The habit of convergent thinking of those African leaders should be considered



as examples to overcome typical dualisms and polarizations in Western missiological thinking.

#### 4.4. THE CHARGE OF ECCLESIOCENTRISM

##### 4.4.1 THE CRITICISM STATED

The term "church growth" indicates the centrality of the church, the ecclesia, within this theory. It shall now be evaluated whether church growth missiology could be accused of an unbiblical overaccentuation of the church, a so-called ecclesiocentrism.

Verkuyl (1978:68) in his magisterial work "Contemporary Missiology", when first introducing Donald McGavran as father of the church growth school, asks the question, "Can McGavran be charged with ecclesiocentrism in failing to understand that the church must be paired with the kingdom?" Later (Verkuyl 1978:188-189), when he develops his thoughts on the theory itself, he does acknowledge numerous strengths of this theory, but then goes on to list the points where he perceives it to be lopsided and weak. The first point is the charge of ecclesiocentrism. According to Verkuyl, the Bible relates the building up of the church to the kingdom of God, which is much deeper and broader. He correctly says: "In the Bible the kingdom stands central, not the church". Verkuyl (1978:189) goes on fleshing out the first and foremost principle of the missiology presented by McGavran and some of his colleagues, and that is the top priority of quantitative expansion. All efforts have to go into producing numerical church growth. Successful educational activities and social programs may even be misplaced if they do not do exactly that. Any preoccupation "with

matters such as peace, justice, development, and the struggle against disease, poverty and ignorance" is of significance only as long as it directly contributes to the growth of the church. Involvement in a struggle against racism and in political diaconia actually is an escape of the churches from their genuine responsibilities. According to McGavran, churches have only one main job - to multiply themselves. Everything else has to be subordinated to it (cf Bosch 1991:415).

#### 4.4.2 COMMENTING ON THE CRITICISM

This criticism is serious enough and is to be directly related to the topics of "priority of evangelism" and "scope of salvation". The foundational problem is the possibility of an equation of the church with the kingdom of God. Gensichen (1971:132) in his introduction to missiology "Glaube für die Welt" deals with the area of ecclesiocentrism extensively. He states categorically (quoting Hahn):

">Ziel der Mission ist keinesfalls die Kirche, sondern Ziel der Mission und der Kirche ist das vollendete Gottesreich< - und damit, so darf man fortfahren, auch die erneuerte Menschheit, in der Jesus Christus die einzige >Macht, die zu sagen hat<, sein wird ..."

Gensichen (1971:133) underscores the fact that God's salvific acts do not exhaust themselves in saving those who belong to the church only, but extend to the renewal of all humankind, throughout all changing cases and scenarios of history. In regard to this, he sees a twofold danger, a danger of "ecclesiocentrism" reduced of

the other aspects of God's salvific work, and the danger of an extreme "humanization" (Weltwerdung der Welt). While Gensichen states these dangers regarding mission, he tries to "do full justice" to the total spectrum of God's salvific action as described above.

"Eine Mission, die dieser Zielsetzung gerecht werden will, ist auf doppelte Weise gefährdet: Sie kann sich um >Kirchwerdung< der Welt bemühen und gerade damit die verheißene neue Menschheit als die wahre Zukunft der Welt verfehlen. Sie kann sich auf >Weltwerdung< der Welt, wie sie ist, konzentrieren und eben damit die kommende Gottesherrschaft verfehlen. Der Weg zwischen den Extremen ist nur dort zu finden, wo die Mission den >doppelten Aspekt< der Kirche zum Ausdruck bringt: >als Werkzeug und zugleich als Verwirklichung des Königreiches<" (Gensichen 1971:133).

Later Gensichen (1971:135-136) points out that mission will also always have to do with the gathering and growing of the church, so as to "recapture" the idea of the church for mission:

"Die aus Glaube auf Glauben hin geschehende Sendung führt immer auch zur Sammlung und Mehrung der eschatologischen Erwählungsgemeinde in der Welt, der >Ekklesia<, die >nicht nur geglaubt, sondern auch erlebt wird<".

Next, without interjecting any other thought, Gensichen introduces the church growth school into the picture. He starts out stating

his appreciation for the fact that its protagonists keep the church and its growth on the agenda. Here "strategy" is the key (a favorite expression of McGavran) instead of foundational questions of mission. But questions regarding the goals of mission have nevertheless come on the agenda, particularly through the polarization between ecumenical and evangelical mission societies. The tension between those societies correspond at least partly to the tension between the group around McGavran and his critics. But here it can be stated for the evangelical side that the planting and multiplication of churches are of foundational importance. However, these are not the only criteria for the effectiveness of mission. At least, Gensichen welcomes wholeheartedly the fact that the question of church planting and development (Gensichen: "Kirchwerdung"), the gathering of the believers, are kept on the agenda against the tendency to comfort oneself too quickly with the picture of the little flock, and especially against the tendency to escape from the reality of the church by her radical functionalization.

One point is clear, the church is rediscovered as critical category of the kingdom as opposed to earlier tendencies, where the medieval "outside the church is no salvation" was reversed into its opposite. It has transpired over the last years that the kingdom of God and not the church is the ultimate goal of mission (cf Verkuyll 1978:197-198, Shenk 1983:207-217). If the church is a true sign, sacrament and instrument of the kingdom (cf Bosch 1991:374-376), it seems to be logically consistent and very much legitimate to be concerned for the sacrament of this kingdom - the church. And if the church is indeed assigned this place as

true sign and sacrament of the kingdom, it would be no overstatement to call the church "a critical category" of the kingdom. Is it not very much necessary to be concerned for the presence of this sacrament in a given context? Will not a growing presence of this sacrament lead to a fuller manifestation of the kingdom of God and its salvation? And the question ought to be asked the other way around: What about the roots of the kingdom in a given country, for instance in Western Europe, when its sacrament, the church, is numerically dramatically decreasing (cf Hanselmann et al. 1984:70)? Granted, not every person leaving the church is therefore leaving the kingdom of God, and equally granted, not every person leaving the church has ever entered this kingdom. Granted also that the kingdom of God and church cannot be equated - is it not strange to observe a strong mass movement out of the church and not be concerned for the presence and health of the kingdom of which the church is supposed to be a sign, sacrament and instrument?

Suggestions in relationship to this could be made endlessly. But one thought shall suffice: It appears to be sane to be concerned with stopping this trend of leaving the church, to secure the healthy presence of the sacrament of the kingdom and even desire its growth. It seems to be sane as well to employ a missiological concept and research methodology, which is workable on a national scale, which does neither exhaust itself in social analysis nor in reflection, but which provides strategies and plans for action, bridging the gap from research only to missiological impulse giving and assisting in leadership. Logically, this should become difficult to be criticized. The question if church growth indeed

is (or can be) such a helpful missiological concept, should therefore be evaluated in a more favorable light.

#### 4.4.3 Conclusion

Most theories have the potential to be carried to extremes. This is especially true for each theory dealing with a limited segment of a total whole. That the danger for church growth theory would be ecclesiocentrism, seems to be self-evident. If there would be something existing such as a "kingdom growth theory", perhaps it could be expected for an extreme form of "kingdomolatry" to transpire. Numerous examples of going to extremes could be cited from other disciplines of theology, philosophy, politics, ideologies, and sciences. But, as for instance, the smaller segment of business leadership theory would have to fit into a bigger whole of national economic reality, so the limited segment of church growth theory has to fit or made compatible to a bigger missiological approach. Ecclesiocentrism can be expected to manifest where church growth is seen as the superior or only legitimate biblical missiology, and where the church is equated with the kingdom.

That there are some extreme, ecclesiocentric views with some church growth authors is to be regretted, but also to be expected. Other worthwhile missiological paradigms have been carried to doubtful extremes as well, as some liberation theologies, the theme of humanization ("Weltwerdung der Welt", where what still remains of church and mission could or should be dissolved into the world), and other missiologies. But here as there the baby should not be poured out with the bathwater. In this case, where

the church is understood as critical category, sign, sacrament and instrument of God's kingdom, a genuine concern for its growth is not only acceptable but necessary. Church growth missiology should be expected to have the potential to provide a helpful methodology in this respect.

#### 4.5 THE CHARGE OF PRAGMATISM

##### 4.5.1 THE CRITICISM STATED

The charge of pragmatism is one of the most repeated criticisms against the church growth school. Basically it can be found with all authors attempting to give a survey or a comparative analysis of contemporary missiologies. The term "pragmatism" is often defined in the sense of "everything is in order as long as it works and where the end justifies the means" (Bosch 1988:18). The end referred to in this context is maximum quantitative church growth at any moment in any place of the world. Both Bosch (1991:382) and Gensichen (1971:136) communicated their severest criticism by asking the question regarding the *quality* of the churches, which are supposed to grow so fantastically. If quantity is placed above quality, the law reigns and not the gospel, according to Gensichen. Bosch (1985:80) gets the impression of McGavran's book "Understanding Church Growth" that throughout it is a call to evangelism, "but the nature and the quality of the Christianity we transmit appears to be completely unproblematical."

It is especially one single unfortunate statement by McGavran himself which has given rise to this sharpest criticism against church growth:

"The student of church growth, however, cares little whether a Church is credible; he asks how much it has grown. He rates performance higher than promise" (McGavran 1980:159).

This thinking is quite contradictory to Karl Barth's words "No Christian Marshall Plan", given as a warning to Americans in general on December 8, 1948, while church growth as a theory was not around yet. Commenting on the papers prepared for the first WCC Assembly held in Amsterdam that year, Barth (in Hoge & Roozen 1979) said:

"What objection could we really make if it should please God to carry his work onward and reach his goal, not through a further numerical increase but through a drastic numerical decrease of so-called Christendom? It seems to me the only question in this matter is: How can we free ourselves from all quantitative thinking, all statistics, all calculation of observable consequences, all efforts to achieve a Christian world order, and then shape our witness into a witness to the sovereignty of God's mercy, by which alone we can live - a witness to which the Holy Ghost will surely not refuse his confirmation?"



#### 4.5.2 COMMENTING ON THE CRITICISM

McGavran's exclusive emphasis on the numerical approach does not at all represent the present status of church growth thinking any more. Even McGavran's contemporary and colleague, A.R. Tippett had admitted that quantitative growth had received too much emphasis in McGavran's thinking to the neglect of organic aspects of growth (cf Verkuyl 1978:191). Where this is still the case with church growth missiologists, it might have to do with a "mentality of American business where sums, profit, numerical growth and success play such large roles" (Verkuyl 1978:191). Here it has to be realized that according to the law of average the American mindset tends to be stronger on the practical side, while, for instance, the German mindset tends to be stronger on the philosophical side. This appears to be quite comparable to the Romans and the Greeks. The Roman mind was great in organization, building a military machinery, architecture, roads and bridges, while the emphasis of the Greek mind was more on theoretical aspects, languages, literature and philosophical reflection. There are of course always people whose mindsets seem to almost force them to go to extremes. This is not unique to (American) church growth, but it has its counterparts in many other fields like business with its corresponding management science, etc. Comparable tensions like the one between church growth and a few other missiologies are to be observed as well. It would be a fascinating study to analyze the clashes between different paradigms and trace them down to the respective cultural mindset orientations. Extreme pragmatisms should be expected to be found especially with some American authors as much as certain extreme theoretical positions should be expected on the European continent here.

Even where pragmatism can be proved to be an overriding concern of some church growth authors, some qualifying remarks have to be made for fairness' sake regarding some of the criticisms. It is not true that for McGavran the quality of the church was unimportant - the opposite was the case. McGavran (1980:367) did spell out important aspects of quality and credibility of the Christianity we transmit. He should be seen as a child of his times when all too often cheap excuses for unwise or irresponsible stewardship were given by missionaries. "Quality" was a standard excuse where (quantitative) observable results would not only have been better, but could have been possible and would have been a realistic expectation. To this tendency McGavran reacted. This intention of his any reader of his books should be able to verify, even if one disagrees with many of McGavran's conclusions.

Another example of this kind is the criticism against Peter Wagner's suggestion to classify peoples into people groups as "very receptive", "receptive," "indifferent," "reluctant," or "very reluctant." To Wagner's statement that the resistant "are ... not to be neglected or passed, but they are to be held lightly" (in Bosch 1988:19), Bosch responds with the question, "But does not, in this approach, pragmatism tend to reign supreme?" Once again, one may differ greatly with Wagner's conclusions, it takes a complete reading of his "Strategies for Church Growth" (Wagner 1987) to really understand his intention. Wagner argues against an equal distribution of missionaries regardless of the respective openness of the peoples for the gospel because this would at times mean a forcing of the gospel proclamation against the observable will of a people. He does not

say that missionaries ought not to be sent there and that the situations there should not be further observed very carefully. Missionaries should not kill themselves in one place because they are overworked due to the extreme responsiveness of the people, while missionaries kill themselves in another place bumping their heads against the wall because of the utter reluctance of the people. Wagner basically pleads for a little more common sense in mission planning.

The term "pragmatism" is used by church growth author's themselves. How they define that word, and how their critics define that word, seems to be different from each other. Wagner (in Schwarz 1993a:84) quotes a dictionary to define pragmatism as being "concerned with practical consequences or values." This stands in contrast to Bosch's definition (quoted above) of "everything is in order as long as it works and where the end justifies the means."

Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that Wagner defines the word pragmatic correctly indeed, while Bosch's definition would fit the term "pragmatistic" more properly. At least Wagner defends his pragmatism vehemently as not compromising the doctrinal and ethical principles of God, the Bible, and the kingdom, and referring to value-neutral methodologies only.

But church growth protagonists see the request for functionality as very legitimate. Essence and function do not contradict but interpret each other. Emil Brunner (in Schwarz 1993a:79) puts it this way:

"Die ursprüngliche Christologie ist ganz und gar funktional, nicht substantial; man darf wohl sagen, sie sei verbal, nicht substantivisch. Es geht um das, was Jesus als der Christus tut. Von da aus ist zu erkennen, was und wer er ist."

Schwarz (1993a:79) points out that Jesus Christ himself, the incarnated word of God, who has died and risen for humankind, can be called the prototype of what "functionality" from the theological perspective is all about. Therefore one logical consequence resulting from this could be to question the correctness of any theological hypothesis, when it truly hinders the building up of the church, service in society, etc. (cf Schwarz 1993a:76-86). The term pragmatism should be dismissed from the church growth vocabulary as it lends itself to be confused with a secular worldview called the very same. In contrast, the term functionality would place the discussion on a firm theological ground. However controversial the arguments may run, it can never be called "pragmatism versus theology". Functionality also underscores the truth that "how to do something" is always a deeply theological question.

#### 4.5.3 CONCLUSION

There will always be authors of church growth literature holding extreme positions as is the case with author's of other missiological literature as well. There will always be those who are not only pragmatic but pragmatistic. There the charge of pragmatism has to be confirmed. Similar (parallel) charges are to be brought up too against certain author's views, where theorising

reigns supreme to such an extent that any practical application will become virtually impossible. But it has to be realized that theology, the love to God and to the neighbour, will always have to be of such a nature that it can be lived out in everyday life. Theology needs a practical common sense translation according to Martin Luther's interpretation of the First Commandment. Therefore, the term functionality gains weight and lends itself to replace the term pragmatism. In fact, the work of church growth scholars should be evaluated afresh from the perspective of a deep theological functionality. But in light of the present developments within church growth research it can be positively suggested that a general charge of "pragmatism versus theology" should be considered history already.

## CHAPTER 5: TOWARDS A WHOLISTIC MISSIOLOGICAL APPROACH

### 5.1 WHOLISTIC CHURCH GROWTH

The discussion and evaluation of major points of criticism against church growth theory has demonstrated that a wholistic church growth theory should be possible. Orlando Costas (1974:87-149) discussed at length both the advantages and liabilities of church growth missiology. He sees it nevertheless as an important and positive theory of mission. He concludes his analysis with his personal estimation that it is still an open theory. But he points out that its proponents are open to the strengthening of its weak points. He requests every responsible minister of the church to utilize church growth missiology as much as possible and strengthen it with own valuable insights.

Costas engaged himself in quite creative thinking about church growth theory. In 1972 already he saw church growth to happen in four different, but inter-related dimensions, the numerical, organic, the conceptual, and the incarnational aspects of growth. Thus he broke away from the exclusive focus on the numerical dimension (Costas 1974:90).

Under numerical expansion Costas understands the recruitment of persons for the kingdom of God by calling them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of their lives. This should lead to their incorporation into a local community of believers. This community, the church, is made up of persons who have made a similar decision. Church life is characterized by a

common desire to worship, to obey, and to give witness to the world of God's redemptive action in Jesus Christ and his liberating power.

Organic expansion is defined by him as the internal development of a local community of faith. The system of relationships among its members, its form of government, financial struture, leadership, types of activities in which its time and resources are invested, are all included.

Conceptual expansion relates to the degree of consciousness a community of faith has regarding its nature and mission to the world. It has to do with the image the community of believers has formed of herself, the depth of her reflection on the meaning of her faith in Christ including her knowledge of scripture, her image of the world, etc.

Incarnational growth relates to the degree of involvement a Christian community has in the life and problems of her social environment, in other words, her participation in the afflictions of the world. Costas lists her prophetic, intercessory, and liberating action on behalf of the weak and destitute as well as the intensity of her preaching to the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the blind, the oppressed. In this regard Costas makes specific mention of Luke 4:18-21 (!!), which many regard as the key scripture of contemporary ecumenical missiology (cf Bosch 1991:84).

It should be noted that an emphasis on the organic, conceptual and incarnational aspects of church growth seem to have a very special potential for compatibility with other missiologies. These aspects also lead to a position where the numerical dimension of growth appears in a different light.

How radical the break with the exclusive focus on the numerical aspect of church growth has become in some church growth circles is proven by the work of Christian Schwarz. In his recent books he focuses exclusively on qualitative church growth in the areas Costas would call organic, conceptual, and incarnational. Schwarz even goes as far as to call the focus on quantitative expansion a "technocratic approach." For him (cf 1993b:13) goals for numerical growth lack any usefulness .

In the propagation of the kybernetic rules for church growth, he only concentrates on the area of more attractive life within a local church. For this Schwarz and his colleagues have developed mechanisms, which are quite useful tools for diagnosis like questionnaires, which help to identify and develop the profile of a church revealing her strengths and weaknesses. In using these methods, the weakest areas, which need the most urgent attention are identified. If this leads to the right consequences in church life, the actual ministry of the church in meeting human needs would have been significantly improved. With this approach to church growth, pastors experience a great sense of relief. Numerical expansion, increase in service attendance or membership, are not yardsticks for their "success" or "failure" any more. Then church growth as qualitative improvement can be disconnected from



the question whether the church grows or even declines in numbers. Increased quality often does result in quantitative expansion, and often can be expected, but this is not "a hidden agenda", it is not the key criteria for evaluation.

A brief look at the principles Schwarz (1991) introduces in his missiological church growth work "Der Gemeindetest" confirms a very strong overlap with Practical Theology. For him, a "healthy" church, a church which is developing - in the words of Costas - in the organic, conceptual, and incarnational areas, is showing profile in the following:

- Goal oriented pastor
- Gift oriented co-workers
- Passionate spirituality
- Appropriate structures
- Inspiring church services
- Wholistic small fellowship groups
- Evangelistic diaconal service
- A high quotient of love.

The improvement of the weak areas will immediately contribute to the overall qualitative growth of the church.

The scope of this study does not suggest a further introduction and development of these concepts. Suffice it to say that "wholistic church growth" has been and is being developed. The essence of these theories have almost nothing in common any more with those elements of church growth theory so severely criticised in ecumenical missiological literature. The concepts suggested by

Costas, Schwarz and a few others appear to have a great potential to be linked together with other missiological approaches.

## **5.2 SUMMARY OF KEY IDEAS; THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARGUMENT**

- Church growth as a missiological theory is only a few decades old. It provides a research methodology which combines a variety of sciences under the umbrella of missiology. It tries to gather all available facts of the past and present of a church, interprets the causes of successes and failures, and building on that, it comes up with recommendations for the future.
- Therefore, church growth strives to bridge the gap between reflection and action.
- Although church growth was intended to become a value neutral methodology, its first pioneer, Donald McGavran, placed it firmly into the evangelical wing of the church at the heyday of the ecumenical/evangelical polarization.
- This fact, as well as McGavran's personal version of church growth theory, led to a rejection of church growth by large segments of the ecumenical community.
- There is a perceived need by many pastors and church workers for recommendations of how to better respond to the problems and challenges of a given context. Contextual theologies try to respond to this.
- Since the problems of a given context determine the contextuality of theology, a general wholistic missiological approach is needed, which is able to logically connect the appropriate contextual theology and missiological methodology to the respective need. The full spectrum of human needs according to

Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs has to be considered. This is particularly necessary as many missiologies deal only with fragments of human need. But any approach of missiology, which fails to consider the full spectrum of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, falls too short.

- Therefore a larger wholistic missiology is called for of which church growth together with other missiologies would function together with each other.

- This idea is not new. The former General Secretary of the WCC, Dr. Emilio Castro has already thought about creatively linking church growth and liberation theology together.

- The development of such a wholistic missiological approach seems to be imperative in light of Martin Luther's interpretation of the First Commandment: Whatever the need of the neighbour is, determines my response of love. According to Luther, humans owe to God love and faith only, and to the fellow humans only love. But this love nobody can produce on his or her own. The worship service of the community of the believers is needed to receive these qualities from God. These in turn need to be applied by a common sense translation in everyday life. For this, the full spectrum of human needs and diverse possibilities of contextual responses have to be fully considered.

- The development of a general wholistic missiological approach for practical obedience to the First Commandment is also confirmed by classical descriptions of the task of missiology. This task consists basically of reflection and action joined together, or it is seen as reflection leading to action.

- Furthermore, definitions of mission also confirm the need for varying central dimensions within mission according to the

particular context, and therefore encourage the development of a wholistic missiological approach.

- Although the theme of unity can be considered a part of the task of missiology, it is highlighted separately here, as the development of convergent concepts needs unity as attitude of the missiologist as basic prerequisite.

- Especially as church growth missiology is endangered by the ecumenical/evangelical polarization, unity by attitude as willingness to listen is a prerequisite to rethink perhaps already dismissed concepts.

- For diverse missiologies to be linked together as sub-approaches, the question of theological compatibility is critical. The aim here is to suggest possibilities where church growth might fit to other missiologies. For this, common theological ground has to be established. A few suggestions are made by discussing four main criticisms against church growth as voiced by ecumenical missiologists. These are questions regarding a "priority of evangelism", "the scope of salvation", "ecclesiocentrism", and "pragmatism versus theology". It appears that church growth's frequent dismissal from the agenda of many missiologists has been quite unnecessary.

- Meanwhile the development of creative church growth concept goes full speed. The work of Orlando Costas and Christian Schwarz are examples of wholistic church growth theories, which emphasize strongly the organic, conceptual, and incarnational aspects of growth in addition to the numerical. These theories especially appear to have great potential to fit into a larger missiological paradigm.

### 5.3 CONCLUSION

The question, if church growth is compatible to other missiologies can be answered with a very clear "yes". Church growth missiologists are working constantly on the compatibility question, and they are making strong moves towards wholistic church growth theory. This they even do to such an extent that "the ball is thrown" over to the theologians representing the other missiologies. It is up to them to make their own suggestions of how their theories and contextual theologies might be compatible to church growth (1). Indeed, what the liberation theologian Emilio Castro has started, should be followed up. The implications of compatibility of different missiologies should be thought through and discussed individually, and suggestions be made towards a wholistic missiological paradigm. It certainly would profit each Christian camp to work out their own wholistic concepts just for themselves. But here it might be worthwhile to consider the question for the possibility of cross-fertilization between the Christian main streams.

## ENDNOTES

### Introduction

Präses Peter Beier was reported by word of mouth to have questioned the future of the parish system. Obviously this was a controversial statement, and it could not be traced down to have been printed somewhere. Furthermore, it was reported that Beier felt obligated to publicly take his statement back. Nevertheless it indicates that things are being discussed very seriously not only at the basis but even into the highest church circles, which would hardly be officially admitted by the church leadership.

### Chapter 1

(1) It might be interesting to note that McGavran set certain theological boundaries to his theory, at the same time suggesting the possibility to make it theologically compatible to one's own confession. Can this be called a purposeful theological ambivalence? The full quote: " Church growth is basically a theological stance. God requires it. It looks to the Bible for direction as to what God wants done. It believes that Acts 4:12, John 14:6, and scores of similar passages are true. It holds that belief in Jesus Christ, understood according to the Scriptures, is necessary for salvation. Church growth rises in unshakeable theological conviction.

But since church growth has been born in an interdenominational milieu and taught to missionaries and ministers of many theological persuasions, and does not allow denominational differences to hide God's desire that His lost children be found and His churches be multiplied, therefore advocates of church growth have avoided voicing those of their own theological convictions which are not - at this time under these circumstances - either causing or preventing church growth. Naturally therefore to denominational theologians church growth looks inadequately theological. They consider it as method not theology. Baptismal regenerationists complain that church growth does not believe in baptism. Some Calvinists complain that church growth overlooks the sovereignty of God. Pentecostals tend to feel that church growth gives insufficient emphasis to the Holy Spirit. Those fighting for social justice like to say that church growth men teach cheap grace. Those interested in liturgy find that church growth says very little about liturgy.

To all such critics we reply, >The basic positions of church growth are profoundly biblical and theological; but are not a complete theology. Complete your theology by building these basic growth concepts as to the urgency and authority of evangelism into it. As you set forth church growth theory and theology for your congregations and your denomination use your own creedal statements, your own system. *Voice church growth theology in your patois.* Do not attack church growth as theologically inadequate. Make it adequate according to the doctrines emphasized by your Branch of the Church. The test as to whether you have done this or not is whether your congregations are stimulated to vibrant grateful growth such as New Testament churches exemplified<" (McGavran 1970:7f).

(2) Missiologists from different societal contexts seem to interpret the "Homogeneous Unit Principle" differently. It is

true, from an ecclesiological perspective this principle is debated all around the world as the church should be a prophetic voice within society instead of streamlining herself to general societal trends. She should not isolate fragments of society, but rather reconcile and practically bring together. However, the reaction against this Homogenous Unit Principle as a part of church growth theory is especially sharp and negative from the contexts of segregated societies like South Africa. In a country like Germany, for instance, this principle is receiving renewed interest from the standpoint of communication (Simson 1992:114-122). This is much easier in a country where experiences with segregation are missing. In a West European complex mass society it is observable that more and more non-Christian sub-cultures are developing. Towards the people in these groups a real communication gap seems to be widening. It has even become a real linguistic problem already. To learn the language of the sub-culture often seems to be a prerequisite for any communication, including the communication of the gospel. Many missiologists in Germany feel that love dictates the application of the Homogeneous Unit Principle for the sake of communication. From the ecclesiological perspective, the practical outcome, the creation of sub-culture churches like the "Jesus Freaks" in Hamburg is a matter over which the opinions are divided.

## Chapter 2

(1) Verkuyl's and Bavinck's definition of missiology fully quoted, first Verkuyl (1978:5): "Missiology is the study of the salvation activities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit throughout the world geared toward bringing the kingdom of God into existence. Seen in this perspective missiology is the study of the worldwide church's divine mandate to be ready to serve this God who is aiming his saving acts toward this world. In dependence on the Holy Spirit and by word and deed the church is to communicate the total gospel and the total divine law to all mankind. Missiology's task in every age is to investigate scientifically and critically the presuppositions, motives, structures, methods, patterns of cooperation, and leadership which the churches bring to their mandate. In addition missiology must examine every other type of human activity which combats the various evils to see if it fits the criteria and goals of God's kingdom which has both already come and is yet coming." Bavinck (1960: XVII-XVIII): "The science of missions is concerned with the concept of missions; with the task of the church, as established in the Scriptures; and with the history and problems of missions. The science of missions is exclusively preoccupied with missions, but then with missions under every possible condition and circumstance, at home, abroad, among the Jews, the Mohammedans, as conducted by the mother church, and as carried on by the newly established churches. As Christ is sent by the Father (John 20:21), the church is sent by Christ. And it is this aspect of having been sent, as it pertains to the church, which is the object of the science of missions, an aspect that must be clarified at every point by the light of God's everlasting Word."

(2) It is a well known and by theologians often repeated fact that "theology is autobiography" - experience, revelation, scripture, tradition, culture and reason all being formative factors for the context of theology, each of these reflecting to a lesser or

greater degree contextual insights (in Saayman 1990:X). This obvious truth has very special implications and consequences for the development of a missiologist. If missiology contextualizes theology, in a sense it provides leadership to the church concerning its task to the world, then it would be no overstatement to say "missiology gives focus to theology." It can be assumed that the missiologist can fulfil this task only by being both, mentally informed and deeply emotionally involved. Both, head and heart of the missiologist will have to be engaged if his or her missiology will not only be theoretical reflection as exchange of thought with other missiologists or theologians as interlocuters, but if the goal is to assist the leadership of the church as she engages in her mission. This suggests that missiological "information" has first to be "gathered", then be processed to the "heart", the emotional level of a person to inflame that person leading to further theoretical reflection and to a translation into a life-style, which then has the potential to become a point of orientation. This undoubtedly is in itself a highly biographical process - indeed "theology as autobiography". It can be proposed that only a missiology developed and grown this way will be a missiology able to serve the church.

(3) The full quote in the original German: "Da die Missionswissenschaft aber den Glauben insbesondere als Glauben für die Welt reflektiert, bekommt sie im Gesamtgefüge der Theologie eine zweifache Funktion: Sie hat für die ganze Theologie den dimensionalen Weltbezug offen zu halten, wie er mit der *missio Dei* konstituiert ist, vertritt aber auch die intentionale Konkretisierung dieses Bezugs, wie sie in der Mission der Kirche praktiziert wird. Beide Funktionen schließen das kritische Moment ein - in Gestalt der Kritik an der Theologie wie auch der Kritik an der Kirche."

(4) At least this is intended by the theologians at work at these conferences.

(5) The kerygmatic model is explained very well by Bosch (in Saayman 1992:16-65).

(6) For a detailed discussion of Saayman's definition of mission see Kritzinger 1992b:317-318.

(7) Professor Saayman classifies himself as a liberation theologian.

(8) Ecumenical theologians tend to hold a broader definition of the *missio Dei*.

### Chapter 3

(1) Professor Saayman in a personal discussion with the author of this study near Pretoria on 13 June 1993.

### Chapter 4

(1) The atmosphere of the German church growth debate is not essentially different. Ako Haarbeck's (1986:20, 24) comments on Fritz and Christian Schwarz' "Theologie des Gemeindeaufbaus", one of the early German works on church growth, contain statements criticizing parts of Schwarz' and Schwarz' polemical style:



"Die Theologie des Gemeindeaufbaus" ist eine Kampfschrift, voller Polemik, angriffslustig und wenig zimperlich, provozierend, erfrischend und manchmal ärgerlich." "Der Zorn gegen die vorfindliche Kirche, also gegen die landeskirchlich verfaßten, rechtlich geordneten, bekennnisgebundenen Kirchen, wird geradezu zum Verstehensschlüssel ihrer Theologie. Er läßt die Autoren in beißender Schärfe das Versagen der Verantwortlichen bloßstellen."

(2) This criticism stands in direct relationship to the criticism regarding the scope of salvation within church growth missiology.

(3) There are ecumenical as well as Roman Catholic scholars using "mission", "evangelism", and "witness" as interchangeable concepts, the definition of "evangelization" being very similar to the definition of "missio Dei": The term "evangelization" is used for the whole of Christ's offic and mandate; evangelization defined as including proclamation, translation, dialogue, service, and presense; humane development, liberation, justice, and peace are integral parts of the ministry of evangelization (EN 6, Snijders, Geffré, Scherer, Geijbels and Walsh in Bosch 1991:411). Furthermore, it is noteworthy to look at the way Moltmann and Geffré describe the difference between mission and evangelization and their interrelatedness: "I perceive mission to be wider than evangelism. >Evangelization is mission, but mission is not merely evangelization<" (in Bosch 1991:411-412). "Mission denotes the total task God has sent the church for the salvation of the world, but always related to a specific context of evil, despair, and lostness (as Jesus defined his >mission< according to Luke 4:18f ...). It >embraces all activities that serve to liberate man from his slavery in the presence of the coming God, slavery which extends from economic necessity to Godforsakenness<", according to Moltmann (in Bosch 1991:412). And Bosch's definition is helpful to be thought about throughout a discussion on mission and evangelism: "Mission is the church sent into the world, to love, to serve, to preach, to teach, to heal, to liberate" (Bosch 1991:412).

(4) Cf Castro's discussion of the criticisms relating Bangkok 1973 (Castro 1985:22) "Arthur Glasser from Fuller Theological Seminary said that in Bangkok >the cultural mandate was central rather than the evangelistic mandate<. He said, describing the evangelistic and cultural mandates, that >salvation really has implications for both. According to the cultural mandate, God decides to involve men in accepting responsibility for the world. He is concerned about the poor, the oppressed, the weak. He is concerned about government, injustice, oppression, and so on.< But, Glasser says, this is one dimension of the Christian calling. The other dimension, the evangelistic dimension, he does not see very clearly in Bangkok."

(5) Castro (1985:83) describes his concept of different entry points to the kingdom in the following way: "Following on the example of the early church, the church is free to make options, to fulfil its missionary calling in the most diverse ways and in the most different circumstances. There is only one priority for the church - to reflect and mediate the love manifested in Jesus Christ. There is only one goal -- the kingdom. There is only one central reference

-- Jesus the King. And there is one concrete, historical concentration point -- the poor and the powerless."

(6) Samuel and Sugden write: "Therefore conceptually there can be no priority between the task of addressing personal and social change. The love of God and the love of the neighbour mutually interpret one another. Any discussion of priority in the focus of the church's mission will depend not on the concept of mission, but on its context. The love of the neighbour is affected by the nature of the neighbour's context. This is clearly shown in the parable of the Good Samaritan and the diverse ways in which Jesus addressed the Pharisee, the poor and the dying thief with the good news of the Kingdom. The Jericho road sets its own agenda" (in Nicholls 1985:211).

(7) In a personal discussion with the author of this study in Pretoria in June 1993.

(8) Compare this also with Gensichen (1971:213): "Heilendes Handeln kann die Verkündigung der Glaubensbotschaft nicht ersetzen, und umgekehrt. Das Missionshospital als Zubringeranstalt für die Mehrung der Gemeinde wäre ebenso fehl am Platze wie der Verkünder, der durch Heilungsversprechen dem Wettbewerb des Wortes aufzuhelfen sucht." He later goes on quoting Dörr in arguing in favor of the togetherness of proclamation and demonstration over an either/or approach: "Die Gemeinde Christi hat zwar dem Staat gezeigt, was Sozialarbeit ist ... Das Wort aber bleibt der Gemeinde aufgetragen. Vorzeiten hat die Kirche über der Predigt den Nächsten vergessen. Heute scheint es, daß man es oft als unangenehm empfindet, wenn neben der >Direkthilfe< das Evangelium einhergeht. Es wäre an der Zeit, zur Mitte zurückzufinden" (Gensichen 1971:217).

That the intentional mission within the broad mission dimension manifests itself in the proclamation of the word, Gensichen (1971:85) makes clear in the following statement, which seems to reveal him as an adherent of the kerygmatic model of mission: "Somit ergibt sich für die Grundlegung der Mission im Hinblick auf ihr Subjekt: Das biblische Zeugnis statuiert sowohl eine theologische >Dimension< als auch eine anthropologisch-kerygmatische >Intention<, und jeder der beiden Aspekte muß im vollen Umfang zur Geltung kommen, wenn die biblische Sicht nicht verkürzt werden soll. Die Dimension besagt: Gott will das Heil der Welt, und er selbst ist es, der dies Heil schafft, indem er seinen Sohn zum Kyrios macht. Die Intention besagt: Gott besorgt das Heil der Welt in seinem Sohn, indem er die Herrschaft Christi durch Menschen bezeugen, proklamieren und damit in Kraft setzen läßt. Das eine ist nicht ohne das andere; denn beide, Dimension und Intention, sind nur Aspekte des einen unteilbaren Heilswillens und -handelns Gottes. Aber sowohl die christliche Verkündigung im allgemeinen als auch die Mission im besonderen stehen und fallen damit, daß sie beiden Aspekten gerecht werden".

Also noteworthy is Gensichen's (1971:80) concern for a balanced understanding and practice of mission, which might help for a repeatedly needed correction of mission: "Was sich aus der neutestamentlichen Missionsbegründung als bleibend verpflichtende Legitimierung der Mission ergibt, läßt sich nicht in einer missionarischen Magna Charta fixieren, die Punkt für Punkt durch biblische Rückverweise zu belegen wäre. Wohl aber ordnen sich die biblischen Impulse und Akzente für die Missionsbegründung um eine

bestimmende Mitte, um die Wahrheit des christlichen Glaubens, die Wahrheit, die ein Geschehen ist. Jede Grundlegung der Mission muß sich daran bewähren, daß sie jeweils neu auf diese Mitte bezogen wird, und zwar nicht nur theoretisch, sondern auch im konkreten und aktuellen Gehorsam des Glaubens, der Legitimation und Rechtfertigung seines Wollens und Tuns allein von jener Wahrheit zu erwarten hat. - Wo Mission geschieht, geschieht Gottes eigenes Werk, und was immer sich Mission nennen mag, ist nicht Mission, wenn es nicht von dieser Mitte herkommt. Das Kriterium dafür ist nicht in stufenweisem Fortschreiten von einem *regnum naturae*, einer >natürlichen Offenbarung<, zu einem *regnum gratiae* als dem Bereich der Heilsoffenbarung zu gewinnen, auch nicht durch Aufteilung des göttlichen Handelns auf die Personen der Trinität, sondern durch Konzentration auf das Urbekenntnis der christlichen Gemeinde: Christus ist der Kyrios".

(9) Note also the preceding words of Boff and Chethimattam and Castro's accompanying comments: "It is part of the mandate of the church to lead this world back into the kingdom of God, which also means to improve it, develop and elevate it, transform it into a more human world. According to Vatican II the task of the church in the world is, on the one hand, to recognize the autonomy of the earthly affairs and the dignity of the human person, and to manifest its solidarity with the entire human family; and on the other, to see that the community of men united in Christ is led by the Holy Spirit in its journey to the kingdom of their Father. Christ's redemptive work directed towards salvation of men involves also the renewal of the temporal order.

The trinitarian basis of mission work as a movement of loving communication from the bosom of the Godhead, the infinite dynamic of the love and life of the Supreme Good demands that its waves embrace the whole man. We cannot make an artificial separation between the creating and the redeeming God, between the natural and the supernatural life of man. As Johannes Schütte says, >Redemption does not create another world, but recreates the present.<

Here the eschatological dimension of the church's mission is significant. Mission is the manifestation of the eschatological sovereignty of God among nations. Eschaton is the end, but it is also the beginning, the manifestation of God as Master of the whole future. Hence if Christ is the eschatological fulfilment of the glorification of God, he must also be the fulfilment of the missionary hopes and expectations to liberate the whole man. The missionary command >to go< and assemble nations must be considered the inauguration of the sovereignty of God over all men and all creation" (in Castro 1985:113-114).

(10) The question if manifestations of salvation like those in the economic and political areas can be only determined if they are in fact "salvation" after a certain time has passed, was asked by Prof. J.J. Kritzinger of the University of Pretoria to this author at an oral exam at the University of South Africa, at which he participated as an external examiner. The other examiners were Prof. W.A. Saayman and Ds. N.A. Botha. The answer suggested was a very definite "yes".

(11) In this context it is very interesting to see how critical Germans can be towards a political engagement of pastors, especially from the pulpit. The former German chancellor Helmut

Schmidt (1976:76) stands as a voice for the many people who regret the political engagement of the German churches at the expense of the presentation of a biblical, faith supporting message:

"Zuweilen möchte ich mich in den Chor jener einreihen, die den Theologen zurufen: Hört auf, alles zu zerreden, ihr Theologen, sondern laßt unseren schlichten, aber existenznotwendigen Glauben heil. Laßt uns diesen Glauben heil, der für unsere menschliche Existenz nötig ist, gleichgültig, in welchem Beruf wir stehen, und sei es selbst in der Politik, diesen Glauben an Gott als den Herrn der Geschichte, dessen Wille über dem Prozeß und über dem Ziel der Geschichte uns verborgen bleibt. Was Gott gewollt hat, weiß man bestenfalls nachher. Wer es vorher zu wissen meint, täuscht sich selbst und die anderen dazu. Laßt uns also den Glauben an einen Gott heil, dessen Willen uns verborgen bleibt, der uns keine spezifischen politischen Gesinnungen auferlegt, dem wir aber gleichwohl anheimgegeben sind. - Ich denke, jede Kirche muß sich zu jeder Zeit prüfen, ob sie nicht ungewollt oder unbewußt doch eine Theologie der politischen Gesinnung betreibt, obwohl sie es nicht sollte, wie ich denke." It is remarkable that Schmidt contrasts "letting the faith intact" versus "to practice a theology of political orientation". He then goes on mentioning those many instances of German church history where the political dimension has not complemented but replaced the evangelization dimension of mission.

(12) In German these models are called "bekehrungsorientierte Ansätze", "gemeinschaftsorientierte Ansätze", and "anknüpfungsorientierte Ansätze".

## Chapter 5

(1) If such church growth concepts can be integrated into a general wholistic missiologial approach seems to depend very much on the "good will" of the missiologist more than ever again. It really takes the "independent missiologial thinker", the missiologist, who, according to Sundermeier, displays this unity by attitude, as unfortunately we are again beyond the convergence between the ecumenical and evangelical movements and the Roman Catholic Church reached in 1974 and 1975. For more detailed information see "Beyond Canberra", edited by Bon Rin Ro and Bruce J. Nicholls (1993).

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